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Tuesday, 30 November 1999, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab . . . . . (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ikouebe (Congo), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 43 (*continued*)

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/457, A/54/495)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.40, A/54/L.41)

Mr. Lancry (Israel): As we approach the end of the twentieth century, it can be said that the Arab-Israeli conflict is finally drawing to a close. With our largest neighbour, the Republic of Egypt, Israel has enjoyed peaceful relations since the ground-breaking Peace Treaty between our two States, reached in 1979. We have also concluded a Treaty of Peace with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and recently celebrated its fifth anniversary. As I stated here yesterday, we have been steadily moving forward in our negotiations with the Palestinians, and hope to achieve an agreement on permanent status within a year, an agreement that is to put an end to the conflict between us.

The Middle East is witnessing an era of unprecedented diplomatic momentum. The positive atmosphere was reinforced recently by the new diplomatic ties established between Israel and Mauritania. We have, moreover, been expanding our economic and other ties with States in the region from the Maghreb to the Nile and up to the Gulf.

Now, in order to complete this ever widening circle of peace, we must also achieve progress with our northern neighbours, Syria and Lebanon, each of which we equally hope to join in a peace agreement. However, we must also reiterate that as a democratic State, where parliamentary debate is an essential component of the decision-making process on issues of national security, Israel simply cannot accept a precondition for beginning the talks. This is especially true when it is a precondition that demands a prior acceptance of the final outcome in accordance with the views of only one party.

We believe that the history of Middle East peacemaking has shown that the forum best suited for presenting one's views is the negotiating room. Negotiations are the basic bridge to peace. I therefore reiterate the call made here by our Foreign Minister, His Excellency Mr. David Levy, in his address to the General Assembly on 29 September 1999, "to cease hesitating. It is time to talk" (*A/54/PV.16, p. 14*).

In these negotiations, Syria will find an Israeli partner willing to make the difficult decisions necessary to arrive together at a peace of the brave, a peace with honour. We envision this peace as containing a depth of territorial compromise commensurate with both the depth of peace and the quality of the security arrangements that we are able to achieve.

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In addition, we wish to see Lebanon too joining the camp of peacemakers. I would like to take this opportunity to restate that Israel never had, nor do we now have, any territorial claims or disputes with Lebanon. Our one and only interest is to guarantee the safety and security of our citizens. The Government of Lebanon has failed in past years to enforce its sovereignty in the southern part of Lebanon. Unfortunately, it has yet to disarm the Hezbollah and to take back the free rein it has granted militants in southern Lebanon who call for Israel's destruction and who target its civilians with rocket attacks.

In the hope of improving this situation, Israel has repeatedly expressed its willingness to implement Security Council resolution 425 (1978) in its entirety, which calls not only for an Israeli withdrawal but also for the return of the effective authority of the Government of Lebanon in the area and for the restoration of international peace and security. It has now been close to two years since we formally extended to Lebanon our invitation to negotiate the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). Instead, the Government of Lebanon has regrettably chosen to allow the conflict to continue and the human toll to rise. Nevertheless, we call upon the Government of Lebanon to seize the present opportunity to change the situation, to meet us at the negotiating table and to join the tide of peace now emerging in the region.

In the drive towards regional stability, each State has both the power and the responsibility to ensure that its territory does not become a launching ground for terrorist attacks. It should be recalled that the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, contained in resolution 2625 (XXV) of 24 October 1970, makes clear that sovereignty carries a responsibility not to allow terrorist acts to be organized and prepared on one's territory, or to be launched from it.

The policies of Iran, like those of Lebanon, are in direct conflict with that resolution: Iran continues to sponsor and reinforce Hezbollah in Lebanon, and that group openly engages in a campaign against the existence of the State of Israel, backed by Iranian ammunition and Iranian funds. This is symptomatic of the threshold on which we currently stand in the Middle East: a new era of stability and regional cooperation is finally within reach, yet there remain those forces which would spoil consensus and pull us back into a cycle of threats and distrust.

Iran's continuing efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction and its adoption of a policy that does not recognize the right of every State to live in peace and security in the region constitute an alarming example. Iran has already tested a missile with a range of 1,300 kilometres, the Shihab-3, that can strike Israel from launch points within Iranian territory. Even longer range Iranian missiles are known to be under development.

Meanwhile, during the last eight years, Iraq has been under a most intrusive arms control and disarmament regime. Yet, that mechanism did not prevent Iraq from maintaining its clandestine programmes for developing chemical, nuclear and biological weapons of mass destruction. Iraq still remains a major threat to international peace and security. Indeed, Iraq directly threatened Israel with annihilation by chemical weapons and actually attacked Israel's civilian population with lethal missiles.

The peoples of the Middle East can become free of the threat of mass destruction, but only when nations first establish a foundation of trust, and the desire — from within the region — to end a state of war and replace the context of threats and terror with the context of peace and reconciliation.

We have witnessed tremendous progress with our Palestinian partners, through a process of direct talks that succeeded as long as it preserved the essential framework and timetable of Israeli-Palestinian agreements. In particular, it was agreed that issues such as Jerusalem would be resolved directly in the permanent status negotiations.

Nevertheless, in light of the draft resolution before us, I believe that it would be appropriate to restate at this time that Jerusalem is the united capital of the State of Israel, under Israeli sovereignty. King David established its standing as the capital of the Jewish nation over three thousand years ago. Since that time, Jerusalem has been at the heart and soul of the Jewish people, playing a central role in Jewish culture, history and religion.

The city, although holy to three major religions, has never been the capital of any other nation and, save for a 19 year period in this century, has never been divided. We are aware that our Palestinian partners do not share our views on this issue, yet we expect that they do share our commitment to a negotiated solution, to which both sides have obligated themselves in all Israeli-Palestinian agreements. With this commitment in mind, and with the

negotiating process already under way, Israel feels that it is inappropriate for the United Nations General Assembly to prejudice, through its resolutions, the outcome of these talks.

Cooperation is the lifeblood of peace, the force that transforms a mere truce into a lasting reality of peace whose benefits flow to all the peoples of the region. In the spirit of this ideal, the multilateral peace process was born at the Madrid Conference as a parallel track to the bilateral talks, aimed at regional problems that transcend boundaries, so as to promote long-term regional development and security in a wide range of areas.

The five working groups established in the framework of the multilateral talks have met a number of times, but unfortunately their activities have been frozen in the past few years, due to irrelevant political considerations. This is the time to resurrect them. Any delay or imposed condition is liable to undermine the peace process and delay the assistance and cooperation so essential for the peoples of the region.

Along with its belief in the importance of multilateral regional cooperation, Israel is also committed to strengthening direct cooperation with the Palestinians and, bilaterally, with its Arab neighbours. I am pleased to report that such efforts have met with significant success.

The Israeli-Palestinian development cooperation programme, which we described at length in our statement on assistance to the Palestinian people, is now a top priority. Palestinian professionals make up the largest group of students in Israel-based training courses, while a growing working relationship has tied Israeli and Palestinian non-governmental organizations, governmental organizations, health clinics and academic institutions.

With our neighbour Jordan we have enjoyed a unique relationship of mutual goodwill and cooperation, from working together in development programmes to stimulating economic growth in our two States. In 1998, over 130 Jordanian professionals participated in professional training courses in Israel, in areas ranging from agriculture, medicine and public health to environmental conservation and community development. In addition, a variety of cooperative ventures have been launched between the two States, including projects on demining the Jordan Valley, agricultural development programmes and wide range of others that are making progress as I speak here today.

Since the signing of the peace treaty in 1979, Egypt and Israel have acquired much experience in the field of agricultural development cooperation, the success of which can be measured by the friendly relations enjoyed with Egypt's Ministry of Agriculture. Egyptian-Israeli collaboration has taken the form of on-site demonstration activities, professional training programmes, short- and long-term consultancies and research and development projects. This has coincided with the Mubarak Plan, the Government of Egypt's far-reaching plan to reclaim desert lands along the Nile for agricultural cultivation. In 1994, trilateral training programme between Denmark, Egypt and Israel was established, enabling thousands of graduates to participate in professional agricultural training courses conducted in Israel and in Egypt.

Peace between leaders must permeate the consciousness of their peoples. Overall perceptions must be changed, and a solid foundation for continued peaceful coexistence must be fashioned. Much to our dismay, however, we have come to witness a very common, yet disturbing, phenomenon. While direct negotiations are being carried out between the parties, a kind of diplomatic assault is being carried out by some of our Arab neighbours in every conceivable international forum. This situation is impacting negatively on our sincere efforts to gradually build confidence between the sides. We believe that all sides should take upon themselves to abide by a code of conduct appropriate for partners in negotiation and reconciliation. History has shown that peace negotiations are successful when they follow a set of established guidelines for peacemaking.

We cannot afford to lose the present opportunity to bring peace to our region. We owe it to our children, at the very least, to try with all our might to seize the potential for peace while it is within reach. From this podium I call on our Arab partners in peacemaking to continue strengthening the coordination between us, without expending our energies in outdated rhetoric. We will accomplish our common goals only if we all speak the same language, the language of peace. All of us gathered here know the language and the new reality it can bring us. We invite you to join us in embracing it.

Mrs. Al-Nadari (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Once again, as for year after year for more than five decades, this Organization is discussing the question of the Middle East. Many resolutions on the Middle East have not been implemented as a result of Israeli intransigence, based on the logic of power and defiance and its non-response to the will of the international community. Thus, the Middle

East has suffered from a feverish climate: wars, instability and tension. Regrettably, many opportunities for peace have been lost, especially since the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and the agreements and understandings of the principle of land for peace. The whole world has been hoping that the peace process will be successful, despite its complexities, and that a lasting, just and comprehensive peace will be achieved. However, this hope has not been realized.

Now, we have a new chance. The parties and the relevant mediators have been trying to revive the peace process on all its tracks. Yet we see Israel, the occupying Power, exercising its expansionist policies by annexing lands, establishing settlements, appropriating water resources, creating hurdles for this peace and intensifying its policies of oppression and terrorism.

It is high time for the international community to force Israel to honour its commitments and respect international resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations, on the basis of which Israel was accepted as a Member of this Organization. Especially since the cold war and the circumstances for duplicitous positions are over, there is no justification for giving Israel special treatment that protects its illegal practices.

The whole world is now awaiting the implementation of the purposes and principles of the Charter, and expects a world of peace, justice and stability. The culture of peace for which this international Organization is calling is based on the values and ways of life of the international community. Peace starts in the minds of people. It is in the minds of people that the foundation for peace must be built. A just peace cannot be built unless the ideas of occupation, imbalances of power, political manoeuvring and the imposition of faits accomplis are relinquished. There must be the necessary political will to implement the resolutions of international legitimacy, to liberate the occupied Arab territories, including the Syrian Golan Heights and southern Lebanon, to force Israel to withdraw unconditionally from these territories and to restore the rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to establish their own independent State on their territory, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.

Will Israel agree to this? Yemen has lent its support to all efforts aimed at achieving peace and has always supported the Middle East peace process since it began. Like other countries we look forward to seeing an end to pessimism and political frustration; we look forward to the achievement of peace.

We hope that the Middle East will be made a zone free of all weapons of mass destruction. We call on all the parties to continue their work and to redouble their efforts in order to establish such a zone within the framework of international law and in accordance with the principles of justice and fairness. In this way the Middle East and its peoples will be able to enjoy stability, security and peace.

Mr. Krokhmal (Ukraine): For more than half a century, the situation in the Middle East has remained a subject receiving the close attention and deep concern of the United Nations and the international community at large. The continuous international efforts aimed at assisting the peoples of the region to achieve a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East have resulted, at different periods, in progress and setbacks, in successes and failures. Today, at the threshold of a new millennium, there is a strong hope that this process is nearing fruition.

Ukraine has always been supportive of the Middle East peace process based on the principles laid down at the Madrid Peace Conference, in the Oslo agreements and in the relevant United Nations resolutions. We are convinced that all the parties to the process, both Arab and Israeli, have no alternative but to overcome their hostility and mistrust, to stop unilateral acts and to complete the implementation of the Madrid peace process formula, which is based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), as well as on the principle of land for peace.

As the Assembly is aware, the Middle East peace process is progressing unevenly. Currently, different tracks of the Arab-Israeli negotiations are at different stages. While we have seen significant progress on the Israeli-Palestinian track, the Israeli-Lebanese and Israeli-Syrian tracks have been stalled for a long time.

Most recently, Ukraine welcomed the signing, on 4 September 1999 in Sharm el-Sheikh, of the Israeli-Palestinian Memorandum that broke the stalemate and uncertainty that had prevailed in the negotiations for more than eight months. The signing of this document reopened the way to talks on the most complex and sensitive issues related to the final status, such as the status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, the problem of Palestinian refugees, border and security arrangements, the sharing of water resources, and so forth.

Similarly, my country was encouraged by the steps that followed the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. These included the resumption of the permanent status negotiations, the release of 350 Palestinian prisoners, the opening of the southern safe passage route, the understanding on the timetable for the conclusion of the framework agreement and the final settlement agreement, and further Israeli redeployment from parts of the West Bank. We believe that the Oslo summit of 2 November 1999 has also contributed to the revitalization of the peace process.

Ukraine commends the courageous efforts, political will and wisdom of President Arafat and Prime Minister Barak and their determination to pursue the challenging goal of concluding the permanent status negotiations within the agreed timeline. We also pay tribute to the enormous efforts of all international players who over the years have contributed to and continue to support the peace process.

At the same time, we are concerned by continued Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and other Arab territories, despite the numerous resolutions of the General Assembly urging Israel to stop these practices. In this regard, we call on the parties to refrain from any unilateral actions that could prejudge the outcome of the ongoing direct talks and undermine the fragile atmosphere of peace. It is imperative for the parties to strictly follow the letter and the spirit of agreements signed to date and to abide by their commitments and obligations.

My country maintains that the achievement of a comprehensive settlement of the Middle East process will be impossible without bringing the Syrian and Lebanese negotiations back on track. In this regard, we would like to call on the Governments of Israel, Syria and Lebanon to resume their talks as soon as possible.
It is indeed in the interests of all the peoples of the region to resume, without further delay or preconditions, their talks on the problem of the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as to resolve the problem of southern Lebanon and western Bekaa on the basis of the Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

It is common knowledge that international relations in the last decades have been largely dominated by reliance on military strength, the development of sophisticated weapons systems and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. All these characteristics have been observed in the region of the Middle East. We are convinced that the Middle East peace process could have been much more vigorous and irreversible if it had been supported by confidence- and security-building measures and agreements related to preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and to eliminating them.

In this regard, Ukraine believes that accession by all the States of the region to the international agreements on nuclear non-proliferation and the elimination of weapons of mass destruction remains of paramount importance for the peace process in the Middle East. We are also of the view that general support by the countries of the region for the implementation of the idea of establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region would favourably affect the Middle East peace process.

We are also of the view that, at this crucial period of the Middle East peace process, the international community should redouble its efforts to encourage all the parties to follow the path of negotiations and reconciliation with a view to moving forward towards finding compromise solutions to the existing problems. Undoubtedly, the United Nations continues to have a special responsibility in this effort.

In our view, the United Nations should continue to shoulder its primary responsibility for ensuring the exercise by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination and statehood. This Organization should remain a principal guarantor of international legitimacy with respect to the question of Palestine and a major headquarters of international support of and assistance to the Palestinian people.

I would like to emphasize the importance of economic assistance to the Palestinian people and to the entire region. We praise the commitment of the international donor community to assisting the Palestinian people in its economic development. This was confirmed once again at the latest donor meeting, held at Tokyo on 14 October this year. Ukraine lends its full support to the activities of the specialized bodies of the United Nations family, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which marks this year its fiftieth anniversary, and the United Nations Development Programme in providing humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people.

We also hope that the recent appointment by the Secretary-General of his new Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the

Palestinian Authority will give new impetus to the United Nations involvement in that process.

The development of mutually beneficial and partnership relations, on both bilateral and multilateral bases, with all the countries of the Middle East and the facilitation of the peace process remain one of the pillars of my country's foreign policy. In this respect, I would like to reiterate Ukraine's interest in joining the activities of the multilateral working groups on Middle East economic cooperation and providing its military and civilian personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations in the region.

Let me conclude by expressing Ukraine's sincere wish to see the Middle East soon become a region in which all its peoples can live in lasting peace and economic prosperity in a spirit of good-neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation. Ukraine reconfirms its strong commitment to achieving this noble goal.

Mr. Zackheos (Cyprus): My delegation aligns itself with the statement of the European Union. I should like, however, in view of the special significance that Cyprus attaches to the issue, to make a few additional comments and observations.

Cyprus's long and rich history has always been heavily influenced by developments in the Middle East. Situated at the crossroads of Europe, Africa and Asia, Cyprus has, throughout the centuries, served as a bridge between the peoples of the Middle East and Europe. While focusing on strengthening our ties with the European Union, with which we are currently conducting accession negotiations, the promotion of relations with our neighbours in the Middle East remains a significant pillar of our foreign policy. As a neighbouring country having excellent relations with all the countries in the region, we see our role as one of facilitator of cooperation and understanding among the peoples of the Middle East.

We realize that peace will be the catalyst of positive developments of unprecedented scope. This is the reason why my Government supports all the initiatives aimed at finding a just and comprehensive settlement bringing lasting peace and security to the Middle East. We reaffirm our support for the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which provide the framework for a viable peace in the Middle East.

The Government of Cyprus remains committed to playing its part in a practical way towards the enhancement of the peace process. A fundamental element of our position in the Middle East — and indeed in all situations of occupation — is the withdrawal of foreign forces from occupied territories. We reaffirm our support for all the efforts that are being exerted to establish peace, security, stability and economic prosperity throughout the region. At the same time, we recognize the right of all States to exist in peace with their neighbours within secure and internationally recognized borders. In this context, we call for respect of this principle and denounce, in the strongest terms, terrorism and violence against innocent civilians.

While we consider the Palestinian problem to be the core issue of the Middle East conflict, we support the resumption of negotiations between Israel and Syria and the opening of talks between Israel and Lebanon, since we believe that only a comprehensive settlement will cement trust between the peoples of the Middle East, laying the foundations of security, stability, regional cooperation and prosperity for all.

On the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Glafcos Clerides, reaffirmed the close bonds of friendship between the Cypriot and the Palestinian peoples and saluted the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum last September, since this constitutes a giant step forward towards peace.

The parties have set themselves a very ambitious timetable for completing both the framework and the final agreement. Everyone realizes that the road ahead will be a difficult one, requiring determination and political will in order to find a compromise meeting the interests of all and the demands of justice. Nevertheless, we do not underestimate the considerable obstacles that remain. The opponents of peace, irrespective of their motives, remain attached to the old enmities and prejudices. Acts of terrorism are still possible. The international community must remain vigilant in supporting the peace process and denouncing the forces of the past.

We owe it to all courageous leaders, both within and outside the region, to keep the vision alive of a peaceful and prosperous Middle East. Some, such as President Sadat of Egypt and Prime Minister Rabin of Israel, paid the ultimate price for their ideals. King Hussein of Jordan died without seeing a comprehensive peace, to which he

so greatly contributed in various ways, including by signing the Jordanian-Israeli peace accords and by helping to overcome the final obstacles to arriving at the Wye River Memorandum in his final days, as he himself waged a courageous fight against cancer.

Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat have our admiration and encouragement as they embark on the road of peace. This new impetus in the peace process demonstrates that the combination of political will on the part of the sides involved in sustaining international efforts and influence can successfully lead to the resolution of otherwise intractable conflicts that pose a threat to regional and international stability. We hold this to be true also in the case of the Cyprus problem. It is our earnest hope that the positive evolution of the peace process in the Middle East will have beneficial effects the world over, including on the question of Cyprus, which has continued unresolved for a quarter-century due to the failure in implementing Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

The cold war is over, but antagonism and divergent interests persist and have manifested themselves in conflicts that we had hoped would only remain in some dark wayside of human history. The edifice of international relations is threatened and basic principles of international law are either ignored, challenged or selectively applied. Globalization cements the interdependence of our planet, while at the same time the gap between rich and poor continues expanding. Ethnic strife and political fragmentation are on the rise. In these circumstances, the international community is awakening to the need for reconciliation and welcoming any positive developments on the international scene. The settlement of the Middle East problem will send a strong message throughout the globe that there is still hope that diplomacy can succeed in reversing the dire consequences of hatred and conflict and securing peace, stability and prosperity well into the next millennium.

Mr. Dausá Céspedes (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): Today as never before the Palestinian people and the people of all occupied Arab territories are undergoing a critical moment in their history. Madrid, Oslo and Wye River have made it look as though the peace process would become a reality. Yet all these efforts have been frustrated by hostile and aggressive actions taken by the occupying Power, which, far from showing itself ready to negotiate, has continued its policy of illegal settlements and violation of international law and human rights of the Arab people who live the bitter reality of living under occupation.

Hopes were rekindled after the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum. However, despite encouraging signs, the genuine efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region continue to run up against incidents and actions contrary to peace and stability in the region. Despite the clear condemnation by the international community, the policy of illegal settlements pursued by the Israeli Government is maintained, as are deportations, ill treatment and all forms of abuse against the Arab populations. Measures such as these and any others designed to alter the legal status and the demographic composition of the Arab territories under occupation, which are null from the start, violate the most basic norms of international law and international humanitarian law. The social, political and economic consequences and all kinds of adverse effects of the Israeli occupation among the Palestinian and Arab people could not be worse. The harm done to health, the deterioration in sanitary conditions, the psychological consequences, the difficulties in the educational system, the impossibility of achieving family reunification and the limitations placed on freedom of movement all constitute the terrible daily reality of life in the occupied territories.

It is incredible that as we are entering the twenty-first century, and despite more than 25 Security Council resolutions and many more adopted by the General Assembly at special and regular sessions, we have not been able to reach a lasting resolution of the Middle East conflict. This unbelievable reality can be explained only by Israel's total lack of respect for these decisions of the international community and the traditional support of all kinds that the United States Government has offered its strategic ally in the region. The international community expects and demands that this time peace prevail and that a just and lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East be found.

It is necessary to promote the greatest possible support in political, economic and moral terms for achieving peace. The United Nations has a great share of the responsibility for this task. Solidarity with the Palestinian people and the rest of the Arab people living under occupation is a question of principles for the Cuban Government and people. It means that we support and defend full respect for all the legitimate rights of these fraternal peoples. For that reason we reaffirm that the Israeli occupation of all Arab and Palestinian occupied territories and the violation of the human rights of the people in these territories must end. Though the Palestinian question constitutes the cornerstone of the Arab-Israeli conflict and there cannot be a permanent

solution without fully meeting the just demands of the Palestinian people, neither can there be a lasting solution if we do not put an end to aggression and the occupation of the territories in Lebanon and the Syrian Golan.

We all have a responsibility to assume, and we cannot rest until we achieve a just and peaceful settlement of the Middle East conflict. The occupation and the annexation of territory cannot be the starting point for any peace negotiations in the area. It is time for Israel to show its readiness to negotiate and its commitment to peace and security in the region. It is time to put an end to occupation and aggression. It is time to stop trampling the rights of the Palestinian and Arab peoples. It is time that all the forces that defend peace unite in defence of the noble cause of the Palestinian and Arab peoples subjected to occupation. The traditional solidarity and support of the Cuban Government will not be lacking in these efforts.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I call on the Observer of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): There is agreement in the international community that the question of Palestine, with its strong and direct repercussions, is the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the Middle East as a whole. However, the situation in the Middle East has other important aspects that are also the subject of much attention aimed at reaching appropriate solutions and achieving a comprehensive peace in the region.

At the outset, I wish to refer to specific aspects of the question of Palestine, whose dimensions extend to the regional situation and perhaps even farther. There is the issue of Jerusalem, which is at the heart of the question of Palestine. At the same time, Jerusalem has a central importance for the Arab world and for the Islamic and Christian worlds in general. Therefore, reaching an acceptable solution to the status of Jerusalem based on international legitimacy is a prerequisite for solving the question of Palestine in its totality and for establishing peace and stability in the region as a whole.

There is also the issue of Palestinian refugees. There are still approximately 2 million Palestinian refugees, out of approximately 4 million who live in the Arab countries neighbouring Israel. While we appreciate our Arab brethren hosting our refugees and bearing an immense burden in this regard, including providing them with reasonable living conditions without discrimination, we reiterate that the real and just solution to the refugee problem is the implementation of General Assembly resolution 194 III of 1948), which reaffirms their right to return to their homes and properties and to compensation for those who do not wish to return.

I also refer to Palestinians displaced from Palestinian territory during the 1967 war. They number around 700,000. Moreover, I refer to Israel's procrastination and its refusal to allow them to return in accordance with Security Council resolution 237 (1967), which was also supposed to be put into effect during the transitional period in accordance with the agreements between the two sides.

Israel continues to occupy other Arab territories, in addition to the Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem. It continues to occupy the Syrian Golan and southern Lebanon. Israel persists in violating international law, international humanitarian law and the United Nations resolutions relevant to these two areas. We reiterate the necessity for full Israeli withdrawal from the Syrian Golan in implementation of Security Council resolution 242 (1967), and we affirm the necessity to resume negotiations on the Syrian-Israeli track of the peace process, starting at the point where the negotiations broke off.

With regard to Lebanon, we affirm the need for Israel's unconditional withdrawal from Lebanese territory in implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). We also call for the resumption of negotiations on the Lebanese-Israeli track.

Israel's insistence on possessing nuclear capabilities and its refusal to join the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to place its nuclear facilities under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) put the whole region in grave danger. This position will undoubtedly lead to further complications in this sensitive area, including the possibility of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction of all types in the region, in addition to other dangers or risks, such as the possibility of unintentional destruction in this small and densely populated area.

In addition, there is Israel's insistence — as well as that of some of its friends — on pursuing armaments in general. This includes the establishment of new armaments systems, including missile systems. Some of Israel's friends used to claim that their arming of Israel was a reaction to the former Soviet Union's arming of some Arab parties. However, they now declare publicly that they want to preserve Israel's military qualitative

edge. Peace cannot be achieved through military might, and it will never grow and prosper under the mentality of deterrence and military edge. We affirm the necessity for stopping armaments to the region, and we affirm in particular the necessity for establishing a nuclear-weapon-free zone, one also free of other weapons of mass destruction, in the Middle East.

The scarcity of water in the Middle East region is one of the important problems that may be increasingly exacerbated in the coming years. It is regrettable that Israel has not ceased its theft of Arab water resources, stealing enormous quantities of water from Palestinian and other Arab sources. It is imperative that Israel cease this and recognize the rights of others, as well as the Arab parties' permanent sovereignty over their natural resources, including water, in order to pave the way for finding long-term solutions to this serious problem.

Solutions should have already been found for some of these issues; they should have been negotiated through the multilateral negotiating channels. However, the continuous, intransigent Israeli position in violation of international legitimacy with regard to returning the occupied Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese territories to their rightful sovereigns, which is the first and basic prerequisite for establishing peace, continues to impede the effective resumption of these negotiations.

We hope that through a speedy resumption of the Syrian track and through progress on the Palestinian track we may move to a stage where we can look into other regional problems, with the aim of finding solutions that will promote the establishment of peace and the consolidation of its foundations.

How can peace be achieved in the Middle East? How can this important region become involved in a genuine development process, utilizing its available potential? The key to such a strategic achievement is to address our deep feelings, even our conviction as Arabs that an unprecedented and grave injustice has befallen us. It is our conviction that some parties promote certain values for themselves, while applying different values to others in the region. It is our conviction that the principles of the Charter, of international law and of international humanitarian law and the priorities of the international community are put aside by those parties when the issue concerns Israel.

What is required is an end to such practice — an end to double standards, and the upholding of the same values and the same international law. It begins with terminating foreign occupation and respecting the principle of the right of peoples to self-determination. After that, it will be more feasible to achieve all other important goals on the same basis of establishing peace and prosperity for all the peoples in the Middle East region.

Yesterday, the representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations expressed our position vis-à-vis the question of Palestine. However, I cannot fail to say a few words in response to the statement made by the representative of Israel a few minutes ago. For example, what he said concerning Jerusalem really makes light of the position of the international community. It is a direct challenge to the will of the international community, to the will of the Assembly. This Israeli position is not only different from the Palestinian position but violates international law and General Assembly and Security Council resolutions.

Let me refer here to the fact that the Security Council has repeatedly stressed in its relevant resolutions that Jerusalem is an indivisible part of the occupied land and that all Israeli measures aimed at changing the legal and demographic status of the city of Jerusalem are null and void. A repetition of that Israeli position in this house of international legitimacy requires in itself the condemnation of the international community and not merely a reaffirmation of its position vis-à-vis Jerusalem based on international legitimacy and law. I shall not respond to the Israeli delegate's attempts at distorting history. Let me just say that negotiations on the future of the city must not and cannot mean that Israel can take a position violating international law and international legitimacy and impose it by force on the Palestinian side. We will not accept that — not now, not ever.

As for the Israeli delegate's reference to the development cooperation programme, I hope that it will not lead to the belief that things on the ground are just fine. Until a final settlement is reached and peace is established, the relationship will remain a relationship between an occupying power on the one hand and an occupied people on the other.

As for speaking of the Arab diplomatic offensive at a time when talks are taking place, it is, frankly, the ultimate in irony. Let me just say that the Israeli side, using naked force once again and at the time when talks are taking place, continues to confiscate land, our land, the land of the Palestinian people. It continues to transfer Israeli civilians to occupied Palestinian land; it continues

to build offensive settlements that are harmful and destructive to the peace process; it continues its illegitimate policies in the city of Jerusalem; and it continues to hamper any true and serious Palestinian economic development. Such illegitimate measures run counter to all the agreements and positions expressed regarding peace.

Now the representative of Israel — or rather, the representatives of Israel — are calling on the Palestinian side to put aside international law, to set aside the resolutions of the United Nations. They do not want us to complain to the international community about the treatment meted out to us. International law and international legitimacy are, and will remain, the foundation for reaching a final bilateral agreement between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, if such an agreement is to achieve a durable, comprehensive and just peace as well as stability in the region. This is precisely what we want.

Ms. Wensley (Australia): The year 1999 did not start off as a particularly auspicious one for the Middle East peace process. It seemed that both sides in the peace negotiations were experiencing difficulty in rebuilding much of that sense of common purpose which had developed over the preceding five years since the original Oslo agreement.

The half year between the Wye River agreement and the Israeli general elections on 17 May was a frustrating one for all those who had worked so hard to get the peace process back on track. But while the period was not an easy one, neither was it one where it seemed to us that the peace process was in serious danger of collapse. This was essentially because all those involved in striving for genuine peace in the Middle East know that they have no alternative but to keep the peace process alive.

The 1993 Oslo agreement marked a sea change in the search for peace in the Middle East. It is true that difficulties and frustrations have attended almost every step in this process. But we must remember that it is a process: a series of steps which build upon each other so that the final result, which we firmly believe to be achievable, will have come about through gradual, careful and deliberate negotiation and not through imperfect solutions imposed from outside or as a consequence of inherent power imbalances or short-term political expediency.

This does not make for spectacular breakthroughs or overnight changes of heart. But it does provide the space necessary for two peoples to become accustomed to the idea of cohabitation and cooperation.

This was why Australia welcomed the 4 September Sharm el- Sheikh Memorandum, which breathed new life into the peace process by re-establishing the basis of trust and of common purpose between the two sides.

We should all commend Prime Minister Barak and Chairman Arafat for their commitment and their hard work. We also acknowledge the constructive role played by Egypt in facilitating the agreement at Sharm el-Sheikh.

We applaud the ongoing and tireless efforts of the United States to provide positive and imaginative encouragement to the negotiating parties.

We recognize, however, that the timetable drawn up at Sharm el-Sheikh is an ambitious one. We offer the parties every encouragement in their efforts to meet the deadlines set down.

Nobody is under any illusion that the most complex, sensitive, emotionally charged and physically challenging issues in the Israeli-Palestinian context remain to be resolved. These include the place of the Palestinians in the international community, the status of Jerusalem, settlements, border delineation, the future of Palestinian refugees throughout the region, particularly in Lebanon, and such vexed and vital questions as the allocation of water resources.

To this end, we very much welcome the intention of both sides to seek initially a framework agreement by February, and we welcome the reaffirmation of the parties at the November Oslo summit to work with vigour towards reaching this interim framework agreement.

We believe that there must be a renewed effort to engage Syria and Lebanon in the negotiating process on the basis of the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Australia believes that a lasting settlement can be successful only if the sovereignty of each of the parties is respected, if there are effective guarantees for Israel's security and if there is an outcome regarding the Golan Heights which is acceptable both to Syria and to Israel.

So, at a time when there is renewed and realistic hope of genuine progress in peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, we call on Israel, on Syria and on Lebanon to seize the opportunity to work towards a regional peace which will be truly comprehensive.

My Government has consistently condemned terrorism in all its forms in the context of the Middle East peace process. We reiterated that condemnation over the recent indiscriminate and callous bombing in the Israeli city of Netanya. We also hope that the renewed atmosphere of peace in the region will lead to a situation in which both Israeli and Lebanese civilians will no longer become victims of tit-for-tat violence.

We have also called upon all parties involved in peace negotiations to avoid other actions which might threaten the revitalized sense of optimism in the wake of Sharm el-Sheikh. Australia regards settlement activity in the occupied territories as both contrary to international law and harmful to the peace process.

We have continued to express our concern over the past year over the emergency special session process. My Government took a strong view against the holding last July of a conference of the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to discuss measures to enforce the Convention in the occupied territories.

Frankly, we were astonished at the proposed timing of that conference, virtually days after the forming of a new Israeli Government which had committed itself to pursuing peace. We were also concerned about the dangers of the politicization of one of the most effective humanitarian instruments that the international community has been able to devise. We hope that the emergency special sessions will not need to be resumed.

The ongoing suffering of the Iraqi people — a subject of continuing concern to us — is, in our view, directly attributable to the unwillingness of Iraq to comply with United Nations Security Council resolutions. It is the Iraqi leadership that holds the key to alleviating the suffering of the Iraqi people. In the meantime, Australia continues to support humanitarian measures, such as the oil-for-food programme, that are directed at relieving the plight of the Iraqi people.

Australia remains concerned that for over a year now no weapons inspections have been undertaken in Iraq. We look forward to the early conclusion of negotiations in the Security Council on a new omnibus resolution on Iraq setting out, *inter alia*, the shape of a future weapons inspection regime. We urge Iraq to comply fully with all Security Council requirements in relation to its weapons programme.

As the situation in Iraq illustrates, the Middle East is a region where the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles is a vexed issue. We acknowledge that our common goal of promoting the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction has to be seen within a broader vision of peace in the Middle East. Nonetheless, we strongly urge all States in the Middle East that have not already done so to become parties to all these instruments.

With regard to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), we have warmly welcomed the accession to the Treaty by the United Arab Emirates, Djibouti and Oman since the landmark 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference. We reiterate our appeal to Israel, as the only regional State yet to accede to the Treaty, to give serious consideration to the security benefits for itself and for the region of acceding to the Treaty and of placing its nuclear facilities under international safeguards.

Australia recognizes that the Middle East will be an important issue for consideration at next year's NPT Review Conference. We encourage those countries most directly engaged to continue their dialogue, with a view to resolving their differences to the greatest degree possible prior to the Review Conference or finding a way of managing these issues at the Review Conference itself.

Australia was pleased to support the consensus draft resolution adopted this year in the First Committee on the creation of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East.

We will continue to work with others to maintain the strength and momentum of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), which embodies the global norm against nuclear testing. We urge all countries in the Middle East region that have not yet done so to sign and ratify the CTBT at an early date.

We welcome the fact that States of the region have joined the international consensus to begin negotiations on a fissile material cut-off treaty. Once concluded, a universal and effectively verifiable cut-off treaty will serve as another valuable security- and confidence-building mechanism in the Middle East and, obviously, in other regions of tension such as South Asia, and more broadly.

We also urge all States in the region to ratify the Chemical and the Biological Weapons Conventions, as

these heinous weapons of mass destruction pose one of the most serious threats to regional and global security and must, in our view, be countered. In addition, we urge regional States to support efforts to bring negotiations on a verification protocol to the Biological Weapons Convention to a successful conclusion as soon as possible.

Australia urges Middle East States to contribute to efforts to strengthen the global regime against landmines, including by ratifying the Ottawa landmines-ban Convention, in support of the Convention's ultimate universalization. We recognize that coordinated international assistance, in association with effective national mine action programmes, will help address problems in the Middle East, and also in other mine-affected regions, resulting from the emplacement of landmines.

Finally, on this subject of disarmament with respect to the Middle East, it is of concern to us that a number of Middle Eastern countries continue to develop and to proliferate long-range ballistic missiles. We urge States in the Middle East region to exercise maximum restraint in the development and the proliferation of long-range ballistic missiles.

In conclusion, let me return to prospects for peace in the Middle East. Last year we were very cautious in expressing the hope that 1999 would see real progress in the peace process. While our assessment now is that the atmosphere is more favourable in the region than it has been for some years, we are conscious that many of the problems yet to be resolved do not lend themselves to easy solutions. Negotiations between even the closest of friends can become acrimonious and time-consuming; and we are well aware that there are many in the Middle East who have suffered grievously over generations and who find it hard to forget past injustices. But it has been the strength of support for peace on both sides that, we believe, has been instrumental in their making the enormous strides thus far towards a resolution of such an old conflict.

Israelis and Palestinians both have made it clear that overwhelming majorities of their peoples want the security and safety of a permanent peace because they know only too well how pointless and destructive is the alternative. Though it is still early days, we welcome what we perceive as a growing sense among hitherto sceptical groups on both sides that the current peace process must be given every chance of success. We would urge all parties to the peace process to build an ever-widening constituency for peace through cooperation at all levels, especially in enhancing people-to-people contacts.

Australia is not a key player in the politics of the Middle East, but we address this issue as a concerned member of the international community. We think it important that even non-key players throw their support behind what is a historic opportunity for peace. We would urge all members of the international community to give credit to those leaders who take the hard decisions for peace — often in the face of overwhelming domestic opposition — and who, as we have seen twice already in recent history, have paid for this with their lives.

This year saw the loss of two other Middle East leaders who were instrumental in creating the international atmosphere necessary for the peace process to move forward. In February we all mourned the loss of King Hussein of Jordan, who had done so much, not only as a beloved and respected leader of his own people during one of the most turbulent and difficult periods in the history of the Middle East, but also as a pillar of strength behind the peace process that grew out of the Madrid Peace Conference.

We were also saddened by the death, in July, of King Hassan of Morocco, who played an important role — one often unrecognized and unheralded — in building a belief in the region that peace was an achievable and worthy goal.

The wisdom of both these leaders will be sorely missed.

As a fitting legacy to those who have paved the way, it is our earnest hope that the forthcoming year will see steady movement towards a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians. We know there are no magic formulas, and we know that cool heads on both sides are not promising such formulas. It is, however, inevitable that expectations are raised each time there is a sign of a new willingness to compromise. We would urge all parties in the region to respond to signs of willingness to compromise by themselves displaying an equal willingness, and to join with their neighbours in seeking imaginative solutions to the region's problems. We look forward to a positive year for peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Ould Deddach (Mauritania) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Islamic Republic of Mauritania pursues a foreign policy based on firm foundations: good neighbourliness, peaceful coexistence and the strengthening of cooperation

at the regional and international levels. In implementation of these principles, my country attaches great importance to the consolidation of stability and the containment of the many hotbeds of tension in various parts of the world, hotbeds that threaten international peace and security and hamper development in various regions of the world.

My country is following the situation in the Middle East closely and attentively. In this regard, while reaffirming anew our full support for the peace process, we believe that no just, lasting and comprehensive peace can be established in this region save on the basis of the Madrid frame of reference — the principle of land for peace, and the full implementation of the relevant Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). This will ensure the full withdrawal of Israel from the occupied Palestinian territories, the Syrian Golan Heights, southern Lebanon and western Bekaa. It will also ensure restoration of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people, foremost among which is their right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent state, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Today, as we approach a new era, the international community looks forward to reviving the peace process and returning it to its proper track. This will require taking the necessary measures for the resumption of negotiations on all tracks. In this regard, we support the Syrian demand to resume negotiations at the point where they left off. It is our hope that the co-sponsors of the peace process will make every effort to ensure that the opportunity to achieve peace in the region is not lost.

Peace is a strategic choice. There is no substitute for it. This has been Mauritania's consistent position since the Madrid Peace Conference, and this is how Mauritania has viewed the Oslo agreements and the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum.

Proceeding from its national principles and the importance it attaches to the Islamic and Arab causes, Mauritania reaffirms that its position is firm and will never change. In this regard, we renew our support for all resolutions relevant to the question of the Middle East and the sacred question of Palestine, particularly those pertaining to Jerusalem and the refugees.

Mr. Vural (Turkey): Our discussion of the situation in the Middle East is taking place today in a somewhat more positive and promising environment. The peace process has gone through a difficult phase during the last three years. There was a strong erosion of confidence between the parties. With the general elections in Israel, a new atmosphere has emerged, and the process has started to move forward.

We are happy to note that there is a desire on both sides, Israeli and Palestinian, for moving the peace process forward. The most important element would be to create an atmosphere of confidence. This requires adherence to previous commitments.

The Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum for the implementation of the Wye River Memorandum has been an important move in the right direction. With the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, the final status talks have already started. The decision to conclude a framework agreement in five months and a final status agreement in a year are key goals to be achieved.

The Oslo meetings of 1 and 2 November of this year were useful and served the purpose of getting the two sides to move ahead. We congratulate the leaders of Israel and Palestine on their courageous and wise stand, which has made this breakthrough possible. Those who have inspired, sponsored and supported these important steps, the United States Administration in the first place, also deserve our high praise.

This year, we lost two prominent leaders of the Middle East who had dedicated themselves to the peace process. We all remember with great appreciation and affection the role played by His late Majesty King Hussein of Jordan and His late Majesty King Hassan of Morocco.

It is our sincere expectation that both the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships will remain engaged in the full implementation of the Madrid and Oslo accords. International political and economic support to the continuation of this process is as important as the initial backing it has received. My Government is committed to do its part in this respect.

The situation in the Middle East and the delicate nature of the peace process require our constant attention. The recent positive developments should not lead the parties and the international community to ignore the existence of the three major obstacles before the peace process, which are the following.

Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) still remain to be implemented. Terrorism, violence and extremism continue to be serious

risk factors for peace and stability. As a country that has suffered immensely from terrorism, Turkey believes that those countries that refuse to renounce all terrorist activities cannot be treated as reliable and credible actors in the peace process. And finally, socio-economic deprivation, unless urgently addressed, could very well undermine the diplomatic and political gains made.

There is no doubt that the parties to the peace process still have considerable obligations and responsibilities to fulfil. Discontinuation of the illegal settlement activities in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, is a priority in this respect.

The Wye River process, enhanced by the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, should also inspire the parties of the other bilateral tracks of the peace process, namely Israel, Syria and Lebanon. They should be able to resume negotiations on the basis of the principles of the Madrid Peace Conference and the relevant Security Council resolutions.

The resumption of talks on the other tracks, which Turkey will welcome, should not cause the Israeli-Palestinian track to be sidestepped. We are ready to continue to make contributions to the multilateral track once it has been resumed.

The Palestinian issue lies at the core of the Middle East question. It will not be possible to reach lasting peace and stability unless the problem is solved in line with the just, legitimate and rightful aspirations of the Palestinian people. The people, Parliament and Government of Turkey are united, strong supporters of the just cause of the Palestinian people. We believe that the international community should remain alert to the situation and difficulties of the Palestinian people. The living conditions of the Palestinians need to be urgently improved in order to build a sustainable level of economic and social well-being and prosperity. In this context, being privileged to serve as Chairman of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), I would like, from this rostrum, to emphasize that enhanced support for UNRWA by Member States continues to be important, now more than ever. Over the years, we have helped to promote the needs and aspirations of the Palestinians and provided direct help for the realization of their legitimate aspirations.

As a regional Power and player with long-established ties to the Middle East, Turkey maintains good-neighbourly relations with all the countries of the region. We share a common history, geography and culture that bind us together. We enjoy good relations with Israel, as well as with all the Arab countries. One of Turkey's main foreign policy objectives is to find peace — a lasting and comprehensive peace — in this conflict torn region. We have always advocated dialogue and mutual tolerance as the means to attain that objective. We believe that the success of the peace process will create an environment conducive to the enhancement of cooperation between the countries in the region, particularly in the economic field.

Throughout history, the Middle East has contributed immensely to our material and spiritual enrichment, both as human beings and societies. A fertile land for culture and tolerance has turned into the battlefield of the twentieth century. The peoples of the region have been victims of endless wars and conflicts. The only way to turn this tide is to ensure the continuation and successful completion of the peace process. There is no alternative. Both the parties directly involved and the international community must help the Middle East regain its spiritual and material prominence in the international system.

Mr. Jemat (Brunei Darussalam): I would like first of all to join other speakers in thanking the Secretary-General for his report (A/54/457) on the situation in the Middle East and the question of Palestine.

The Middle East situation has always been an issue of grave concern to all of us here. We therefore welcome the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement as an important achievement for the final status negotiations. Brunei Darussalam is particularly encouraged to see the continued implementation of its provisions, including the redeployment of Israeli forces in the West Bank and the opening of the safe passages. We are also pleased to note that this progress has led to the recent Oslo gathering. There is still, however, a long way to go before a lasting peace can be truly achieved. The remaining issues, such as the borders of the Palestinian State, the status of Jerusalem and the fate of millions of displaced persons are yet to be resolved.

Brunei Darussalam believes that lasting peace for the people of the region must be based on relevant Security Council resolutions and the principle of land for peace. The freezing of settlement activities and the evacuation of settlers are also vital if lasting peace is to be achieved. Attempts to change the demographic nature of the occupied Arab lands serves only to exacerbate tension.

We hope to see the full implementation of the interim agreements and some progress on other tracks of the peace process. We welcome the negotiators' indication that the question of Palestine could be resolved soon, and we would like to reiterate our full support for ongoing peaceful dialogue as a means for achieving a just and comprehensive settlement. The conclusion of the negotiations on the final status would be a major breakthrough.

Finally, we wish to take this opportunity to express our appreciation to all members of the international community who have contributed to revitalizing the peace process and renewing its momentum. We would also like to express our continued support to the Palestinian people for their just and legitimate struggle for peace, freedom and an independent homeland.

Mr. Arhin (Ghana): The unprecedented hope which greeted the Madrid Peace Conference was reversed three years ago as the international community began to witness the degeneration of the peace process into a state of almost permanent stalemate. The inversion was caused by the lack of progress in the negotiations, owing to the reluctance of one party to implement agreements that had already been concluded. Given the stalemate, an upsurge in violence was inevitable. Fortunately, a return to the way of peace seems possible again, following recent positive signals in the region.

My delegation welcomes the revitalization of the peace process and urges all parties to stay the course until a comprehensive and lasting peace, based on the principle of land for peace and on the relevant Security Council resolutions, has been achieved. We are encouraged by the historic pledge of Prime Minister Ehud Barak to make the pursuit of peace on all three tracks of the Middle East issue the supreme goal of his Government. The Sharm el-Sheikh accord, reached between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, is a source of hope for the restoration of the peace process on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks. To this end, it is essential that all the parties avoid unilateral actions and omissions which could pose difficulties to the peace process.

Israel's withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories, including East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan, as well as southern Lebanon and western Bekaa, is a necessary condition for the achievement of durable peace.

In this context, my delegation is gravely concerned by Israel's continued insensitivity to the international community's objections to the building of Jewish settlements.

It is my delegation's prayer that the occupation of southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa will soon be consigned to the pages of history and that Lebanon's sovereignty over that part of its territory will be restored. As recent events have eloquently manifested, the continued presence of an occupying force in southern Lebanon is a constant source of violence. In January alone, the occupying force and its allies launched over 100 armed attacks on Lebanese towns and villages, resulting in the destruction of innocent lives and property. The occupation has posed an unnecessary challenge to the Lebanese Government as it grapples with the monumental task of development while trying to consolidate the country's nascent political stability.

The existence of Israeli settlements in the occupied Syrian Golan has been an impediment to progress on the Israel-Syrian track. My delegation reaffirms its support for Syria's right to reclaim its territory. We believe that, as intractable as this aspect may seem to be, the time to make progress is now. To that end, we urge both sides to make the compromises necessary for peace and to demonstrate to the world their relentlessness in the pursuit of that noble and laudable objective.

We take this opportunity to pay tribute to the gallant men and women — including, I am proud to mention, nationals of my own country — who are serving with the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon and with the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in the Syrian Arab Republic. They have, without any doubt, acquitted themselves creditably in a difficult and often dangerous environment. We salute all those who have had to make the ultimate sacrifice for the cause of international peace and security.

There is a time for war and a time for peace. Peace in the Middle East need not be elusive. It can be achieved, but only through constructive negotiations, dynamic compromises and the sincerity of the parties in abiding by existing agreements. It is our fervent conviction that, sooner rather than later, peaceful coexistence will be brought about between Israel and its neighbours.

Mr. Vantsevich (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): The Republic of Belarus has always considered developments in the Middle East peace process to be of paramount importance. The tangible results achieved over the past

few months towards a peaceful settlement in the Middle East give rise to hope that the stagnation that characterized the peace process in the past will at last come to an end.

Belarus welcomes the recent signing at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, of the Memorandum between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), because it can provide major impetus towards the irreversibility of a peaceful settlement and towards the return of the parties to timely and scrupulous implementation of agreements already achieved, the foundations for which were laid at the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference and strengthened in 1993 with the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements and with subsequent implementation agreements. We were inspired by the recent palpable steps taken by the Palestinians and the Israelis to move their positions closer together with a view to reestablishing a climate of trust and constructive partnership. This has been reflected in such events as the opening of a road between Gaza and the West Bank, which unquestionably constituted a major step towards addressing humanitarian, social and economic problems in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

In the view of Belarus, there can be no successful settlement in the Middle East unless the role of the United Nations is maintained and enhanced. The Organization's constructive contribution to peace-building in the region is recognized by all. It is our firm belief that the principle of land for peace and the unconditional implementation by all parties of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) form the very foundation of the Middle East peace process. In that context, Belarus welcomed the outcome of the international Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention, convened on 15 July 1999 at Geneva in response to General Assembly resolution ES-10/6. At that Conference the international community affirmed the applicability of the Convention to the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Belarus views the outcome of the Conference as reflecting the continued significance and constructive role of the United Nations in the achievement of a settlement in the Middle East.

Belarus fully supports the activities of relevant bodies in the United Nations system, donor countries and intergovernmental organizations intended to redress the negative social, humanitarian and economic impact on the Palestinian population of tension in the Middle East. In our view, the efforts of the international community on this matter are an important — an integral — part of a comprehensive settlement of the situation in the Middle East. One of the key outcomes of such a settlement must be the enjoyment by the Palestinian people of its inalienable right to self-determination and independence.

Belarus is convinced that it is absolutely necessary that there be progress on all three negotiating tracks in the Middle East peace process: the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese tracks. Here, Belarus is prepared to welcome any initiative from the parties that could help establish a just and lasting peace in the region.

Today we are witnessing an overall turn for the better in the quest for a peaceful settlement of the situation in the Middle East, and it is more important than ever before that the parties refrain from any action that could have a negative impact on the fragile balance that is emerging as the peace process develops. In that connection, Belarus views as counterproductive any manifestation of extremism or terrorism as a way of pursuing political goals. We hope that the parties will make full use of the positive results that have been achieved to date in the process of achieving a peaceful settlement, including the adoption of active concerted measures to fight terrorism and extend cooperation in the field of security.

Belarus also reaffirms its commitment to the inalienable right of all States of the region to live within safe, internationally recognized boundaries.

In conclusion, I would express our confidence that the international community's broad-based support and assistance for the goal of a peaceful settlement of the situation in the Middle East will strengthen the peace process on its present course, so as to guarantee its continuity and its success.

Mr. Sharma (India): As in previous years, the General Assembly is once again discussing the situation in the Middle East. That region, a cradle of human civilization, is of importance and concern to the entire international community. To that region, tormented for decades by wars, terrorism, disputes and discords, the last decade of this millennium brought the hope, with the Madrid Conference of October 1991, that lasting peace was within its grasp. In the twin-track approach the Conference approved, India has participated in the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process and has attended the meetings of the working groups set up to discuss regional issues. We welcomed the Madrid Conference, the Oslo accords and the Wye River Memorandum. The Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum,

signed between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) on 4 September 1999, setting out a mutually acceptable mechanism for implementing various interim agreements, such as Oslo II, the Hebron Protocol and the Wye River Memorandum, has once again proved that, given the required will and determination and a commitment to settle disputes peacefully, no odds are insurmountable, no goal too far. Diplomacy and statesmanship have once again triumphed. We welcome this.

We hope that the timely implementation of the Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum will lead to the resolution of outstanding interim issues and help fulfil the aspirations of the people of the region. We also hope that the Memorandum will impart the necessary momentum for the successful completion of final status negotiations by September next year, as agreed between Israel and the PLO. We are happy to note that the first steps have been taken to implement the Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum. It is our view, that any unilateral action which may delay or retard the peace process and is not in keeping with the letter and the spirit of the understandings arrived at should be avoided. We urge the parties concerned to implement the agreement in good faith and sincerity; this will also create the necessary environment for the timely and satisfactory conclusion of final status negotiations.

While there has been considerable progress in the peace process between the PLO and Israel, the same is not true of the Syrian and the Lebanese tracks, which have been stalemated for years now. We believe that progress on these tracks is equally important for a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the region, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the principle of land for peace, and enabling all countries of the region to live within internationally recognized and secure borders. We trust that early steps will be taken by the countries directly concerned to break this impasse.

India is vitally interested in peace, development and stability in the Middle East, a region close to our heart and with which we share bonds of history and culture, reinforced in modern times through multifaceted cooperation encompassing trade, investment, cultural exchanges, technical assistance and human resource development. We have a vibrant economic relationship with the region, which has one of our largest foreign investment projects and bilateral trade exceeding $1 billion. Over the years, we have shared our technical expertise and experience and have imparted technical training to a large number of nationals of the countries of that region, with which we remain committed to further diversifying and strengthening our bilateral relations. We wish these relations to expand in all cooperative areas in the years to come.

Mr. Picasso (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Peruvian delegation joins the general sense of optimism in greeting the resumption of the peace negotiations in the Middle East. The Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum, signed in Egypt last September, is a clear demonstration of the readiness of the Palestinian and Israeli authorities to continue to move towards a permanent resolution of their differences. In doing this they had the important support and collaboration of friendly countries and countries facilitating the negotiations, from both within and outside the region. These are basic milestones in the construction of an area of peace, reconciliation, understanding, solidarity and justice in that region of such great historic, religious and cultural importance.

In recent years Peru has sought with determination to resolve its border problems on the understanding that they directly impede peace and development. On the way to the final agreements with Ecuador and with Chile, we have encountered difficulties and the ups and downs of negotiations. This has required much time, patience, imagination and dedication, but our peoples sincerely desire to achieve lasting peace and to enjoy the benefits that it brings. These efforts are allowing the emergence of a new regional political setting, that based on peace, respect for treaties, friendship, integration, cooperation and development, propels us and integrates us into the international community. If this experience teaches us one thing, it is that there cannot be any limits or any excuses for not making the necessary effort for peace.

In this regard, we encourage all States, particularly those directly involved, to continue to pool their wisdom and will in the search for peace in the Middle East, carrying forward the process that was begun in Oslo and Madrid and that has continued with the subsequent agreements, from the 1995 Israel-Palestine Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, signed in Washington, to the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, to which we referred to earlier.

Similarly, we emphasize the need for complete compliance with the General Assembly resolutions that have been adopted on the basis of the Charter of the United Nations and of international law and humanitarian law, and particularly, with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), which provide

the basis for the Middle East peace process. This will contribute to promoting an irreversible world peace that will benefit all peoples, peoples of diverse religions, cultures and nationalities.

The cultural, artistic and religious event known as Bethlehem 2000 will be held in that city this December. The event will be taking place at a very special time of reflection and hope. The Peruvian delegation once again welcomes this initiative, convinced that it will contribute to encouraging dialogue and tolerance in the region and pleased that this project has received the unanimous support of the international community a few weeks ago in this very Hall.

The current conditions and the efforts that are being made inspire real hopes as to our chances of attaining the long-sought goal of peace in the Middle East. It is from this perspective that we encourage further progress and await hopefully the consolidation of this progress.

Mr. Yamazaki (Japan): Let me begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for preparing the report (A/54/495) on agenda item 43, "The situation in the Middle East". Let me also reaffirm my Government's wholehearted support for the Middle East peace process and our hope to see the achievement of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace as soon as possible.

Last year in this Hall, Member States, including Japan, welcomed the signing of the Wye River Memorandum and expressed the hope that it would lead to real progress in the peace process. Unfortunately, the implementation of the Memorandum has encountered various obstacles, which has hampered progress in the overall Middle East peace process.

The signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum in September this year, which has given new momentum to the peace process, is therefore especially welcome. The Memorandum's greatest significance lies in the fact that by signing it, the new Israeli Government has demonstrated its renewed and constructive commitment to the peace process.

Japan is also encouraged that the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum has given much-needed impetus to the process by setting a time-frame for the permanent status negotiations — that is to say, the conclusion of a framework agreement by February 2000 and a comprehensive agreement by September of the same year.

Japan is pleased to note the steady implementation of the Memorandum, as exemplified by the opening of the southern safe passage route between the West Bank and Gaza. Indeed, each step in the Memorandum's implementation is extremely important, not only for the tangible progress it provides, but also because it helps build trust between the parties in their negotiations aimed at achieving the ultimate goal of peace. We sincerely hope that the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum will help accelerate the envisaged negotiations leading up to a framework agreement and, ultimately, a comprehensive final status agreement.

The road to peace in the Middle East has been a long and difficult one for all parties concerned. My Government believes that a genuine peace can be achieved only through the sincere will and determination of the parties concerned to achieve a just and comprehensive outcome. Thus, we value and support all their efforts to advance the peace process, such as the meetings that were held in Oslo among the leaders of the relevant parties earlier this month.

Japan has supported the current Middle East peace process since it was launched in Madrid in 1991. Recognizing that its successful conclusion is essential for the stability and development of the region and, indeed, of the world as a whole, Japan has actively supported and continues to support international efforts towards that end. It is determined to take every opportunity to foster an environment that is conducive to direct negotiations between the parties concerned. Japan has been an active participant in the multilateral tracks by serving as the gavel-holder of the Working Group on Environment and as the shepherd of the tourism workshop of the Regional Economic Development Working Group. At the same time, my Government has also been making various efforts at the bilateral level to encourage the Arab and Israeli sides to make further progress in the peace process.

Last month, Japan hosted the ministerial-level Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting in Tokyo in order to coordinate and promote the assistance efforts of donor countries. At that meeting Japan announced that it would play a political role in addition to providing economic assistance. While emphasizing the fundamental importance of self-help efforts by the Palestinian people, the Committee called for the prompt disbursement of the assistance pledged by the donor countries. The Ad Hoc Liaison Committee meeting was conducted in an exceptionally friendly atmosphere and achieved its

original objectives. We also believe that this Committee has been instrumental in enhancing the political momentum generated by the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and in keeping the peace process on track.

In addition to these efforts at the multilateral and bilateral levels, Japan has been contributing to the peace process by providing assistance to the Palestinian people. Since the Oslo accord of 1993, it has extended aid totalling approximately $500 million. Japan has also been actively contributing personnel to international efforts by, for example, dispatching a contingent of its self-defence forces to participate in the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force.

The Middle East peace process is at a critical juncture; the opportunity for genuine progress is perhaps greater now than it has been for many years. The sincere hope of the Japanese Government is that the new momentum will be maintained throughout the difficult final status negotiations, so that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region can at last be achieved. In concluding, I would like to reiterate Japan's strong commitment and continued support for the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Abu-Nimah (Jordan) (*spoke in Arabic*): The question of the Middle East and the question of Palestine at its core remain important items on this Assembly's agenda. They will remain so until the desired just solution of these questions is achieved and peace prevails throughout the Middle East.

My delegation participates in the discussion of this item this year, recalling with feelings of sorrow and hope the loss to the entire world of a leader who laid the foundations of peace in the Middle East — His Majesty the late King Hussein Bin Talal — and who devoted his life to peace, reconciliation and stability in our region. This great loss has grieved us, yet we also feel hope because the message of peace proclaimed by the late King Hussein will continue to be broadcast by His Majesty King Abdullah II, who, since assuming power, has never once hesitated to follow in the footsteps of his great father towards the reconstruction of the country and the achievement of the lofty goals and objectives in which we believe and for which all the peoples and States of our region yearn. I cannot fail to express my sincere thanks to the friendly delegations who expressed kind words for His late Majesty.

My delegation is pleased by the progress made in recent months in the peace process after the stalemate that hindered it for many years. This progress was enhanced by the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum early last September. Moreover, this positive development was followed by several promising steps, such as the release of a number of Palestinian prisoners, the opening of a safe passage between Gaza and the West Bank and the implementation of a phase of the withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian territories. Many provisions of the Memorandum remain unimplemented. These steps are important achievements, though modest in view of the slow progress towards peace. The road to peace remains long, tortuous and difficult, despite the passage of nearly eight years since the peace process began in Madrid.

There is a need to reaffirm the role and responsibility of the United Nations vis-à-vis the question of the Middle East and the peace process. It must reactivate its role and reaffirm its responsibility in support of efforts to move the peace process towards its desired objectives. The United Nations, its Charter, its resolutions and their provisions are the principal bases for the solution of disputes and the mainstay of international legitimacy. The peace process is based on the resolutions of the United Nations. Security Council resolution 242 (1967) is the main foundation of the current peace process. That resolution opened the door to peace in 1967. We will be able to achieve the desired peace through its implementation in letter and spirit. Yet this and other resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly remain unimplemented, despite the fact that they were adopted decades ago and have been reaffirmed at each subsequent session of the Assembly.

In this regard, my delegation wishes to emphasize a number of basic principles that we believe constitute sound and solid foundations for the establishment of peace, security, coexistence and cooperation among the peoples and States of our region, without exception. We are compelled to do so particularly because the debate on this item is taking place at a time when the Israeli and Palestinian sides are discussing the most delicate phase of the peace settlement: the final status negotiations.

First, on this day last year and in the course of the discussion of this item before this Assembly, we reaffirmed Jordan's conception of peace as just, lasting and comprehensive. This understanding was shared by most of the international actors directly involved in the question of the Middle East. Our commitment to peace in this context is a strategic one based on our conviction that peace is a basic necessity for all the countries and peoples

of the region. Once achieved, it will be the catalyst of a sea change in the history of the region. It will be a new beginning on a journey towards new horizons of security, stability, peaceful coexistence and a secure, normal life for the countries of the region, of which they have been deprived for almost six decades.

Thus, in 1994, Jordan signed a Treaty of Peace with Israel, based on its belief that such a Treaty would rectify the situation between the two countries, mark a new start in normal, good-neighbourly relations between them and lay the foundation and principles of cooperation between them in all fields. In Jordan, we opened the door to peace without reservation and without shying away from any aspect of fully normalized relations. We did so in the hope that the Israeli-Jordanian peace might set an example to be followed by other neighbouring States of Israel and so that the Jordanian approach might be adopted as a model of commitment to the provisions of the agreement, their implementation in letter and spirit and their translation into a tangible reality. We also wanted our neighbours in Israel to rest assured that, for us, peace is not a document to be signed as an end in itself nor as a cover for stabilizing the causes of conflict and consolidating the gains of war. As we understand it, peace is a reality, a practice, a cooperation and a relationship based on the principles of mutual respect, honouring commitments and implementing them faithfully and responsibly. It was our great hope that this approach would be followed by progress and eventually by an agreement on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks in order to make regional peace comprehensive and to jump-start development and economic reconstruction in the region. We are still awaiting the achievement of this noble objective, now that the main impediments to it have been eliminated.

Secondly, the peace process is based on well-known and solid principles, foremost among which is that of land for peace. This principle was set out in Security Council resolution 242 (1967), which declares the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force and constitutes one of the main foundations and terms of reference of the peace process. How can justice be achieved without a full Israeli withdrawal from all the occupied Arab and Palestinian territories and the return of all lands to their rightful owners? How can the land be returned if settlement-building is pursued and new facts continue to be created on such land? How can we be persuaded that peace is the ultimate objective towards which we all endeavour when official declarations made in Israel reaffirm continued settlement activities in the occupied Arab territories? How can there be confidence in the sincerity of the desire for peace and the achievement of justice when the Israeli occupation authorities persist in demolishing Arab homes, displacing Arabs, expropriating lands, building roads, digging tunnels and creating new facts on the Arab territories that are expected to be returned to the Palestinians?

Settlements built in the occupied territories are illegal and constitute a violation of United Nations resolutions, of human rights, of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of all the bases of the peace process. Ongoing Israeli settlement is one of the main obstacles impeding progress towards peace, and it turns the call for peace into a hollow slogan devoid of meaning and content. Peace cannot be achieved by the continuous deepening of the causes of conflict. Rather, it is achieved by the elimination of these causes. Peace cannot be established by settlement expansion and the denial of the rights of the Palestinian side. Peace can only be achieved by justice. Justice is the basis of peace. Peace is the framework for security.

Thirdly, the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Agreements of 1993 approved the postponement of a number of sensitive and important questions, such as settlements, Jerusalem, refugees and the final status negotiations. It was only natural and imperative that the postponed matters be left unaltered until negotiations have begun. It is inconceivable that this postponement has become an opportunity for Israel to change the facts on the ground in favour of the occupiers and to prejudge the final status negotiations. We had warned earlier that the postponement of negotiations on these important questions, which constitute the core of the conflict, does not mean overlooking them or leaving them without acceptable, just and appropriate solutions. We also warned that leaving any problem without a solution will be a reason for rekindling the conflict. Serious and bold solutions are the ones that address the problems properly, not ones that ignore the rights of the Palestinians in the hope that they will disappear with the passage of time.

We note with a great deal of concern that as the Israeli and the Palestinian sides negotiate the framework of the final settlement, Israel continues to sanction settlement-building and other unilateral actions. This runs totally counter not only to the core of the peace process, but also to the commitments signed and accepted by Israel. It is all the more strange that these positions are taken by the new Israeli Government whose election we welcomed after its moderate, peace-oriented programme enjoyed the support of the Israeli people.

Fourthly, the achievement of comprehensive peace necessitates the resumption of negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks at the point where they left off, in order to arrive at the desired settlement on the basis of the Madrid frame of reference, the principle of land for peace and Security Council resolutions, particularly resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Progress towards peace and the achievement of peace are sure guarantees for checking extremism and violence and for the prevalence of security and safety. There was great hope that negotiations would resume on these two tracks after Mr. Barak's Government took power. We support all efforts aimed at removing the obstacles on those two tracks. It is our hope that we will witness genuine and rapid progress on them.

Fifthly, the question of Jerusalem is one of the main points of the peace process, and a just resolution of it is very important. There is consensus at all legal, international and political levels that East Jerusalem is an integral part of the West Bank occupied in 1967. Therefore, the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and of relevant Security Council resolutions are applicable to it. The Security Council has attached special importance to the city of Jerusalem since the beginning of the Israeli occupation. It adopted a number of resolutions that reject the annexation of the city and all Israeli legislation and measures aimed at changing the status of the Holy City and other actions aimed at altering its demographic and geographic composition.

Therefore, any measure taken by Israel since its occupation of the city to alter its demographic, political or legal status can only be considered as creation of new facts and a fait accompli to be imposed on the Palestinian side in the final status negotiations. This cannot be accepted. Statements made consistently by some Israeli officials about Jerusalem being the eternal capital of Israel run counter to all the bases of the peace process. The city of Jerusalem is the spiritual capital of the three monotheistic religions and, therefore, it should be an ideal and noble symbol of peace and coexistence. Israeli withdrawal from the territories it occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem, the return of those territories to their rightful owners, and the establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine do not mean a new division of the city or the building of walls and fences in the middle it. It means the establishment of justice and the kind of peace that people will welcome, maintain and consolidate.

Sixthly, the Palestinian refugees who were forced to leave their homes in 1947, 1948 and 1967 and those who were deported during the long years of occupation as a result of individual deportation decisions all await a just solution, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, international law, human rights and the rights to personal property, and in particular General Assembly resolution 194 (III). United Nations resolutions have provided for the right of Palestinian refugees to return and to receive compensation for their suffering of years of occupation and for all the material and moral damage they have sustained. The resolution of this question is one of the most important bases of peace and security in the region. We feel that repeated statements by Israeli officials denying the right of the refugees to return are prejudgment of the final status negotiations and therefore impede responsible negotiations and are obstacles to peace.

Seventh, in conclusion my delegation would like to reaffirm its full support for the option of peace and for efforts made by the Palestinian National Authority to establish its national institutions and to continue negotiations with the Israeli side in order to arrive at appropriate and just solutions for the remaining questions and to achieve a just peace between the two sides. My delegation calls upon the Israeli side to move forward with the implementation of the peace agreements and to renounce any actions that will erode confidence in Israel's commitment to the peace that we have repeatedly called for.

The most important thing is to stop settlement activities and to respect the rights of the Palestinian people, in accordance with the Madrid frame of reference and relevant United Nations resolutions, in particular the right of the Palestinians to self-determination, the return of their territories and the establishment of an independent State on their national soil, with Jerusalem as its capital, so that a just and comprehensive peace can be achieved and the region can move towards a more prosperous, peaceful and secure life. We believe that the United Nations, which embodies international legitimacy, must play a vital role in advancing the peace process and in support of the efforts made by the co-sponsors of that process.

We also believe that it is essential for the European Union to continue its efforts in support of those of the co-sponsors of the peace process in order to mobilize all such necessary efforts in all fields for helping the peace process succeed in achieving its objectives. This is important, especially since the European Union members have contributed to peace efforts from the beginning and

continue to contribute to the economic development process as well.

My country looks forward to a wider and deeper international understanding of the economic, financial and developmental needs of the countries and peoples of the region and of the establishment and maintenance of peace in the Middle East. People build and consolidate peace. Yet they do not view it as an abstract concept; rather, they see it through its dividends and results.

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): As we have all noted, the peace process in recent years has made significant strides, but, disquietingly, ever since the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements by the Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Israel in Washington, D.C., in 1993, it has also often just marked time.

The hope that grew out of the Wye River accords dissipated quickly due to lack of sufficient political will on the part of the former Israeli Government. However, it is once again possible to feel hopeful, as Prime Minister Ehud Barak has seen fit to put the peace process back on track. That is why my country, Senegal, encourages the two parties to spare no effort in implementing the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum signed in Cairo on 4 September 1999, as well as all the agreements entered into by the parties concerned. Allow me to avail myself of this opportunity from this rostrum to express the sincere gratitude of my Government to President Hosni Mubarak of the Arab Republic of Egypt, to President Bill Clinton of the United States of America and to Mrs. Madeleine Albright for the very important role they personally played in arriving at that agreement.

It is a matter of the highest priority for the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel quickly to find common ground on the fundamental issues. It is extremely important, in accordance with the agreed-upon timetable, to come by a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the question of Palestine, which remains the Gordian knot of the crisis in the Middle East. My country, Senegal, faithful to its positions of principle on this thorny set of issues, standing firmly by our brothers, the Palestinian people and their legitimate leaders, will continue, as in the past, to make its modest contribution to resolving the crisis in that part of the world on the basis of the relevant Security Council resolutions — namely, resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as the principle of land for peace.

As regards the Syrian and Lebanese tracks of the peace process, Senegal encourages the State of Israel, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon to pursue their peace talks. Senegal will continue to support the implementation of Security Council resolutions 497 (1981) and 425 (1978) on the Syrian Golan and Lebanon.

Nonetheless, my country expresses its sincere regrets at the non-implementation of the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 53/37 and 53/38 adopted on 2 December 1998, as to the transfer by certain countries of their diplomatic missions still in Jerusalem, and as to the situation on Syrian territory occupied since 1967.

On the threshold of the third millennium, and on the eve of the celebration of the two thousandth anniversary of the birth of Christ in the Palestinian town of Bethlehem, the international community as a whole and the United Nations in particular have a historic mission no one else could possibly take on — that of doing their utmost to keep the peace process on track and to support the efforts of all the key figures in the situation in the Middle East to achieve a just and peaceful settlement of the crisis.

Towards that end, my delegation would like to make a solemn appeal to the co-sponsors of the peace process, and to the multilateral protagonists, to redouble their efforts to see to it that the flame of hope, which has just been re-kindled, does not go out.

In conclusion, my delegation welcomes the appointment by the Secretary-General of Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen of Norway as his Personal Representative to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority and as the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process. My country, Senegal, will give him the support he will need to succeed in his important and delicate mission. Through Mr. Roed-Larsen, my delegation would like to hail his country, Norway, for its sterling contribution to re-starting the peace process in the region which is the cradle of the three great revealed religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The Middle East region, long deprived of peace, must at last find its way back to its two-fold mission of being a place where people meet and mingle and also that of being a place of historic sites from which messages of peace, each of them unique, go out to the world.

Mr. Kolby (Norway): The situation in the Middle East remains one of the most complex and difficult political issues in the international arena. When we look for reasons for this state of affairs, it will not suffice to study the current situation, but we must also look to the recent and more distant past. However, regardless of the complexity of the issues and their long history, it is vital never to lose sight of the fact that the Israeli and Palestinian peoples share a common future and must solve their common challenges through cooperation and joint action.

Peace and cooperation in the Middle East also continue to be important items on the agenda of the United Nations. The guiding principle that the parties followed when the Oslo accord was signed in 1993 is still valid today. Lasting peace can be established only through negotiations and the development of peaceful relations between the peoples of the region. The basis for negotiations remains Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

It is therefore encouraging that there is new progress in the peace process, The final status talks have begun, and the implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum is more or less following the agreed timetable. Direct contact between both sides is the key to the successful completion of the process.

Great efforts are needed to reach a peace agreement that can guarantee security for all. The time-frames outlined in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum are ambitious but realistic, provided there is a continued commitment to them by the parties. It is also vital that an agreement be perceived as fair and balanced by the populations on both sides in order to ensure a lasting settlement of the conflict.

A number of decisions of crucial importance will have to be made during the final status negotiations. The question of Jerusalem and the refugee issue will clearly be among the most difficult challenges during the negotiations. My delegation will stress our firm belief that a final status package must include fair and permanent solutions to these issues.

The United Nations should support the peace process in every way possible. The United Nations must encourage the direct dialogue between the parties and, to the extent possible, provide support to them in the implementation of signed agreements. The primary responsibility for creating a favourable atmosphere for peace negotiations, the negotiating process itself and the implementation of agreements reached belongs to the parties themselves. However, although others cannot impose peace agreements in the Middle East, it is our belief that the role of the international community remains crucial. The international community can provide important support and encouragement to the peace process when the parties show the necessary will to move forward.

Norway's belief in the need for the United Nations to provide encouragement to the regional efforts to give new momentum to the peace process was the reason we, in close cooperation with the Russian Federation and the United States, again this year worked on the draft resolution on the Middle East peace process. However, it was not possible to gather the needed support for the draft resolution at this time. Norway's commitment to all aspects of the peace process and its belief in the important supportive role of the international community remains as strong as ever. It is therefore our hope that it will be possible to re-submit the draft resolution if both the co-sponsors and the parties themselves consider it appropriate and useful to again seek this expression of support for the peace process from the international community.

Norway shares the concern of others regarding Israeli settlement activities on the West Bank. We would urge the Israeli Government to stop any further settlement activities that might change the situation on the ground. At the same time, we would call on the Palestinian Authority to intensify its efforts to promote security.

The peace process contains both political and economic elements. The economic development in the Palestinian territories is critical to a lasting peace and will also benefit Israel. In this respect, the recent Palestinian statements on good governance and the rule of law as fundamental factors for economic and social development are to be commended.

Security is of paramount concern for the whole Middle East region, and security issues are vital to all tracks of the peace process. It is therefore important for all of us never to lose sight of the fact that only lasting peace can provide the necessary security in all its political, economic and social aspects.

Mr. Gatilov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): As we take our leave of the twentieth century, the General Assembly is right to take stock of what has been achieved and to determine what remains to be

undertaken in order to reach a conclusive settlement in the Middle East.

It is perfectly evident that the peace process begun in Madrid in 1991, in spite of the snags and obstacles that have intervened, has moved towards an equitable lasting and comprehensive peace between Arabs and Israelis. This is eloquent proof that the international community is capable of an active search for appropriate responses to meet great challenges and for ways to tackle pressing regional problems.

Russia views the achievement of a comprehensive settlement for the Middle East as an important component of the efforts to stabilize the situation in the world as a whole.

We note with satisfaction that the peace process is gradually emerging from a period of setback, although the situation is still not devoid of tension. Russia, as a sponsor of the Middle East peace process, considers its chief task to provide continuity to the progress already afoot on some tracks of the peace process and to re-establish the negotiations in other fields, based on the standards and norms of international legality, Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the principle of land for peace that stems from those resolutions.

We will continue to put our energies at the service of the task of narrowing the gap between the positions held by the parties and finding solutions for contentious issues.

We are counting on consistent implementation of the Sharm el-Sheikh measures agreed for the transition period, in a spirit of mutual partnership and respect for each other's interests and concerns. This will help build confidence and trust between Palestinians and Israelis and will create an atmosphere conducive to spurring on the negotiations on the permanent status of the Palestinian territories.

In our view, the establishment of a Palestinian State will serve as a significant factor for providing lasting peace, stability and security in the Middle East. Russia fully concurs with the Palestinian leadership's choice to pursue this historic goal through negotiation within the framework of the peace process.

We also support an immediate resumption of Israel's talks with Syria and Lebanon to build on the results that have already been achieved, and we believe that true peace and stability in the Middle East will prove impossible without the return of the Golan Heights to the Syrians and the establishment of normal relations between Syria and Israel.

The achievement of this goal is closely associated with the restoration of the territorial integrity of Lebanon on the basis of the full implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). We continue to believe that in the negotiating process, the parties must accept the need to respect each other's interests and understand each other's concerns, including Israel's concerns about its security.

The time has come to re-establish the peace process in full and across the board. On this important issue, Russia will act in full awareness of its responsibilities as co-Chairman of the support group for the multilateral negotiations. We have already declared our readiness to host a meeting of the group in Moscow.

While noting these positive steps, we are nevertheless alarmed to note news of the continued establishment of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. We call upon the parties to refrain from taking any unilateral measures that could undermine mutual trust and also call on them to be scrupulous in their observance of the obligations they have assumed.

As part of our role as a sponsor of the peace process, we view the economic development of the Palestinian territories as a priority. Many economic goals will be served by implementing the Bethlehem 2000 project, which is aimed at restoring religious and historic sites in Bethlehem and reconstructing and developing the infrastructure. We are ready to work together towards the success of this large-scale undertaking, and we are confident that the celebration of the millennium jubilee will serve to unite all efforts in support of harmony and mutual understanding in the Middle East.

The United Nations has always had an important part to play in the settlement of the question of the Middle East. The convening in New York on 24 September of a conference entitled "Partners in support of peace", in which representatives of the Arab States and Israel participated, gave new impetus to fostering an atmosphere conducive to peace.

We note that the resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the Middle East are now more politically balanced. This is certainly a clear sign of the positive

developments in Arab-Israeli relations. We therefore consider it important to anchor this positive trend in a special resolution, which would be a clear expression of the desire of the parties to achieve a lasting and equitable peace in the Middle East.

To that end, Russia, the United States and Norway have devoted serious and active efforts as authors of a draft resolution that many have rightly described as the "positive" draft resolution. Unfortunately, we did not succeed in having such a draft resolution adopted. But that failure in no way implies that the idea of a positive resolution has lost its relevance. We hope that the next session will see a different result. The adoption of such a draft resolution would be a contribution to accelerating peace in the Middle East and would enhance the role and authority of the United Nations.

Russia will continue to work actively on the issue of re-establishing the comprehensive character of the peace process, striving to convince both Arabs and Israelis to go the last mile and turn their backs for ever on the negative legacy that has been built up over the years in the history of the Middle East.

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate under this agenda item for this meeting.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

May I remind members that, in accordance with General Assembly decision 34/401, statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second intervention and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Zaki (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): My delegation has heard the statement made by the representative of Israel this afternoon, in particular his remarks pertaining to relations between our two countries and a specific reference to cooperation between our two ministries of agriculture, which we do not deny. Indeed, relations between Israel and Egypt cover a number of fields. However, what we found rather strange was the reference by the representative of Israel to what he called the Mubarak plan to reclaim desert lands in Egypt. From his statement one gets the impression that cooperation between Israel and Egypt covers that project or that Israel is helping Egypt increase its arable lands.

It is for this reason that I have requested to exercise the right of reply. I would like to point out that any student of history will realize that Egypt was the place where agriculture was born and that many efforts have been made in the course of the last 50 years to expand agriculture beyond the Nile Valley. Allow me also to point out that efforts in agriculture to reclaim desert lands are based on Egyptian know-how, expertise, sweat and labour — a fact that bears repeating and that should not to be misunderstood.

Mr. Shakerian (Islamic Republic of Iran): This afternoon the representative of Israel raised some baseless accusations against my country.

From the very beginning, Israel has been the main source of division and instability in the Middle East — through occupation, intimidation and the widespread and massive violation of the basic human rights of peoples under its occupation, as well as through resorting to State terrorism as a means of expanding its forcible control.

The occupation of southern Lebanon and the rejection of the international community's call to withdraw from the occupied territories are indicative of that regime's policy in the Middle East. The resistance of the Lebanese people and their resolute determination to liberate their homeland from foreign occupation are legitimate rights recognized by international law.

At the same time, it is astonishing that a regime that has a dark record of developing, producing and stockpiling many inhumane kinds of weapons of mass destruction ventures to accuse a country that is among those in the Middle East that have joined the most basic international instruments in effect in the field of disarmament.

Iran is a full party to the instruments that are the main pillars of international disarmament, such as the 1925 Geneva Protocol, the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Biological Weapons Convention and the Chemical Weapons Convention. Despite numerous calls from the international community, Israel consistently refuses to join these instruments and continues its clandestine programme to develop and produce several kinds of weapons of mass destruction. Israel now remains the only non-party to the NPT in the Middle East. At the same time, its nuclear programme and un-safeguarded facilities continue alarmingly to menace regional and global peace and security.

That regime does not enjoy any better a record in other fields of disarmament, mainly in the biological and chemical areas. There are numerous reports of Israel's clandestine chemical and biological programme. Israel's refusal to join the relevant treaties is another corroborating indication of the existence of these programmes, which heightens the deep concern of the international community about its programmes of weapons of mass destruction and its arsenals.

I would also like to take this opportunity to reject the claim that was raised today by one delegation against the territorial integrity of my country, and to point out that such assertions are unacceptable.

Since our position on the three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf is very clear, I need not get into specifics. I would like only to emphasize that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been, and continues to be, prepared to engage with the authorities of the United Arab Emirates.

We remain hopeful that the United Arab Emirates officials will respond positively to our call for bilateral discussions on the basis of the 1971 understandings.

Mr. Samhan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): This afternoon my colleague, the representative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, expressed his support for the position of the United Arab Emirates on the Iranian occupation of the three islands of the United Arab Emirates — Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa. It is a simple fact that Iran continues to occupy these Arab islands. We reject the statement just made by the representative of Iran. He is well aware that this question has been brought before the Security Council since the beginning of the occupation by his country of these islands, and that these islands are an integral part of the territorial sovereignty of the United Arab Emirates.

Programme of work

The Acting President (*spoke in French*): I wish to inform Members of some additions to the work programme of the General Assembly.

On Monday, 6 December, in the morning, the General Assembly will first take up, under agenda item 8, the third report of the General Committee contained in document A/54/250/Add.2, and two notes from the Secretary-General, contained in documents A/54/236 and A/54/624.

As the last item for that morning, the Assembly will also take up agenda item 167, entitled "Cooperation between the United Nations and the Preparatory Commission for the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization". Under that item, the Assembly will be considering a draft resolution to be issued as document A/54/L.48. Draft resolution A/54/L.5 and the amendments thereto, contained in document A/54/L.10, have been withdrawn.

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.

United Nations A/54/PV.68

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

68th plenary meeting
Wednesday, 1 December 1999, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Gurirab ..... (Namibia)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Ingólfsson (Iceland), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 43 *(continued)*

The situation in the Middle East

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/54/457, A/54/495)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.40, A/54/L.41)

Mr. Larraín (Chile) (*spoke in Spanish*): As in previous years, my delegation wishes to state that the position of Chile on the situation in the Middle East is strictly to abide by principles of international law. We recognize the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination, and we also recognize Israel's right to exist within secure and internationally recognized borders, in accordance with the provisions of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

During the course of this year, the peace process in the Middle East has taken a positive turn, which Chile welcomes and wholeheartedly supports, as it has done from the outset, beginning with the 1991 Madrid Conference and in particular since the historic occasion in Oslo in 1993, when the Israeli and Palestinian people decisively opted for peace.

The signing of the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September last and the resumption of talks for a definitive settlement represent an extremely important step in this process. We know that it is difficult and complicated and that major obstacles have been encountered along the way. In any event, we understand that the Israeli and Palestinian people are prepared to move forward with the peace process, because they know that to live in harmony and friendship is a logical, sustainable and necessary objective for both peoples. They know with growing certainty that only peace and good-neighbourliness will enable them to envisage a secure future for their children, and they know that the well-being of all depends on the achievement of a just and lasting solution in the Middle East.

For that reason, we hope that the negotiations between the Israeli and the Palestinian people will continue without interruption and that no unilateral steps will be taken that would affect this process or prejudge the final results of the talks.

The negotiations between the Palestinian and the Israeli people should also serve as an impetus for talks between Israel and Syria on the Golan Heights. Similarly, Chile hopes that there will be full compliance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978) on southern Lebanon.

Chile has excellent relations with the State of Israel, the neighbouring Arab countries and the Palestinian National Authority. Like the rest of the world, Chile is

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following very closely and with great concern the developments in the Middle East. What happens in that region is important to all of us. We suffer when innocent victims die in attacks, and we welcome such political events as the recent signing of the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum. The triumph of peace and understanding in the Middle East is the triumph of peace for all of us. This meeting of the General Assembly reflects this interest.

The Middle East is a region that is dear to the hearts of all Chilean people. In our country there are a number of Chilean people of Arab origin, most of them from Palestine, and there is a large Jewish population in Chile. They all live together in peace and are proof that coexistence is not only possible, it can be very fruitful.

Mr. Thayeb (Indonesia): Although more than half a century has elapsed, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the core of which remains the question of Palestine, has been the source of endless pain and suffering. The historic breakthrough of the Madrid Conference promised to usher in a new era of peace and tranquillity in the Middle East region. It led to a series of positive developments, strengthening our hopes and aspirations that one of the most tragic conflict situations will be finally resolved.

However, in recent years, our expectations were dashed by a stalemate in the peace negotiations, compounded by the fact that commitments were reneged upon and agreements were not implemented, and the promise of peace receded into the background. Throughout this entire arduous period, the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese leaders have demonstrated great fortitude and commitment to the peace process, not only in words but also in deeds.

As was evident from our deliberations in the General Assembly on item 44, entitled "Question of Palestine", the message of the international community was resoundingly clear: everlasting peace can be established only with the full and unfettered exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinians and the complete withdrawal of Israel from all occupied Arab lands, including the Holy City of Al-Quds al-Sharif, with all aspects of the situation in the Middle East being addressed, including the issue of refugees.

The step forward within the framework of the peace negotiations between the Governments of Palestine and Israel, particularly the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999, was therefore gratifying. Our optimism is premised on the fact that that Memorandum touched on a number of significant issues, including a timeline for implementation of all commitments reached between the two sides since the 1993 Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. Moreover, its importance lies in the reaffirmation of the desire of the parties to reach a final settlement of all permanent status issues by September 2000. Aware of the tenuous path ahead leading to an end over more than half a century of enmity, hatred and mistrust, we remain confident that the unwavering commitment of the Palestinian leaders will be fulfilled.

It is against this backdrop that actions intended to change the demographic composition in the occupied territories, including the Holy City, and the confiscation of Arab lands for the expansion of settlements must cease. Not only do such activities contravene the spirit and letter of the accords already reached, but they also undermine the trust and confidence that is so essential to moving the peace process forward.

Over the years, scores of resolutions and decisions of the General Assembly have reiterated that a just and final settlement of the Palestinian issue is deemed imperative but, concurrently, that lasting peace demands the attainment of a comprehensive peace for the whole of the Middle East conflict. Thus, simultaneous progress is of the utmost importance to address the fundamental unresolved questions, especially on the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks.

Indonesia remains firmly convinced that there can be no lasting solution to the Middle East conflict without the unconditional withdrawal of Israel from all Palestinian and Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Al-Quds al-Sharif, the Syrian Golan Heights and southern Lebanon, and the full implementation of United Nations Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), based on the land-for-peace formula. Only through such an approach can the right of all peoples and countries in the region to independence and security within internationally recognized boundaries be respected.

The United Nations continues to bear a historical and moral responsibility for resolving this intractable conflict in all its aspects. Undoubtedly, the Organization and its specialized agencies have a valuable role to play, given the scope of their assistance to the peoples of the occupied territories. My delegation welcomes the appointment of the United Nations Special Coordinator, Mr. Roed-Larsen of Norway, to ensure that the support

efforts of the United Nations and donors are integrated and coordinated in the vital field of development assistance.

The end of the twentieth century demands that the strong yearning of peoples in the region for freedom, independence and justice soon be fulfilled. Strife and instability should be relegated to history, and sustained development and prosperity should be facilitated so that they can become the order of the next millennium. For this to materialize, however, the historic opportunity for peace should be seized so that a comprehensive, just and lasting peace can ultimately reign in the Middle East.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the threshold of the third millennium a representative of Lebanon is once again standing at this rostrum, and the question of the Middle East is still on the agenda of the General Assembly, as it has been for many years, while we wait for a just, lasting and comprehensive peace. This question must be resolved in accordance with the commitments undertaken at the Madrid Peace Conference, which adopted the land-for-peace formula and the principles of international legitimacy, as represented in Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978) and the relevant resolutions of the General Assembly.

Israel's occupation of parts of southern Lebanon and western Bekaa has continued for more than 21 years. Israel rejected resolution 425 (1978), which the Security Council adopted on 19 March 1978 and which called upon Israel to withdraw its forces unconditionally and immediately from all Lebanese territory. Not only does Israel still occupy Lebanese territory, but it continues its aggression, which has led to tragic occurrences, in 1982, 1993 and 1996, as well as the aggression of June 1999. Israeli air raids have destroyed many civilian facilities in Lebanon, thereby violating the rights of the Lebanese people as they go about their daily lives and jeopardizing their existence and security within their own territory. The Israelis are using the rule of might in place of the principles of justice to prevent the legitimate restoration to the Lebanese people of their occupied lands. In doing so, they are violating the understanding of April 1996 that set up rules and regulations for the protection of civilians, under the supervision of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL). Lebanon is committed to that understanding as a means of bringing about a full and unconditional Israeli withdrawal from Lebanese territory.

Israeli jails and detention camps in occupied southern Lebanon contain more than 141 prisoners and detainees, and that number is increasing daily. They have been imprisoned for many years. Some have been sentenced, and others are being held without trial. They have become hostages, held by the Israeli authorities for bargaining purposes. The Israeli Supreme Court has accepted this situation, which contradicts all principles of justice and all international laws, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention.

Lebanon calls upon the international community and its humanitarian organizations to continue their efforts to obtain the release of those prisoners, who are exposed to various forms of physical and psychological torture, and to force Israel to close permanently the Al-khiyam prison in the occupied Lebanese territories.

Lebanon continues to call for the unconditional implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). That resolution does not call on the parties concerned to undertake negotiations; rather, it calls expressly upon Israel to withdraw immediately and unconditionally.

Lebanon therefore rejects Israel's attempt to begin a process of negotiations on Security Council resolution 425 (1978), which lays down specific arrangements. Such an attempt could undermine civil peace in Lebanon and delay the process of advancement and prosperity.

It is only natural that, in order to bring about that unconditional withdrawal, the Lebanese people should show solidarity with the resistance to Israeli occupation and should claim resistance as a legitimate right of self-defence and of defence of Lebanese territory. That falls within the framework of the principles accepted in the April 1996 memorandum of understanding. Here, I must note that Lebanon values the positive, constructive role played by the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the implementation of Security Council resolution 425 (1978). We thank the officers and personnel of that Force for the many sacrifices they have made since 1978.

Lebanon is among a group of neighbouring countries that mutually interact; we believe that our stability and prosperity are indissolubly linked to the stability and prosperity of our brethren. We therefore joined other Arab parties at the Madrid Peace Conference with a view to achieving a just and comprehensive peace and to ending the cycle of violence and tension in our region. Lebanon is fully convinced that its negotiating approach should be on the Syrian track; that concurrence is in the

strategic interest of both our countries, and gives Lebanon, Syria and Israel enough space to undertake serious negotiations that will solve all pending problems and achieve the settlement we all desire. Lebanon and Syria are very serious about their peace option based on full withdrawal in exchange for just and comprehensive peace. But that requires serious political will and speedy action on the part of Israel in order to prevent political manoeuvring that would be at the expense of the declared principles of a peaceful settlement, founded on the principles enunciated at the Madrid Peace Conference, which were in turn based on the formula of land for peace and on the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Moreover, the negotiations must be resumed at the point they had reached in 1996, bearing in mind the outcome of negotiations that would guarantee withdrawal from Syrian territory to the line of 4 June 1967.

In this context, we stress the role of the two sponsors of the peace process, the United States and the Russian Federation, in seeking to bring about a just and comprehensive peace. We are also relying on an effective European role in the economic and political spheres, particularly during the later part of the negotiations.

We believe that the question of Palestine is the principal course of the Arab-Israeli conflict and therefore support the legitimate national aspirations of the Palestinian people. We support and stress the importance of restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinians, prominent among which are the right to self-determination, the right to establish an independent State of their own, with Al-Quds as its capital, and the right to return to the lands from which they were displaced, in accordance with resolution 194 (III). It is important for us today to stress the absolute rejection by the Lebanese Constitution of settling Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. We call upon the international community to shoulder its responsibility in finding a just settlement that will address the final status of Palestinian refugees in accordance with internationally recognized principles.

This question must be approached not only from the economic, social and humanitarian angles, but also from the political perspective that lies at the core of the Palestinian question. Any peace settlement that overlooks the issue of Palestinian refugees will be unstable and will lead to further instability and serious crises.

Lebanon has suffered a great deal as a result of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The achievement of a just and comprehensive peace would be in the basic interests of Lebanon and of the other parties concerned. Such a settlement should improve the opportunities for social and human development and should bring about a better future for succeeding generations. That cannot be accomplished unless Israel responds to the basic requirement for peace: full withdrawal from all occupied Arab territories.

Mr. Al-Sameen (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): As we approach the new millennium, the world feels optimistic despite the challenges we shall face both because of national, regional and international developments that will arise in the coming century and because of the huge pending challenges that will persist into the twenty-first century.

One of the most important of these challenges is the situation in the Middle East, the core of which is the question of Palestine. The international community views the peace process launched at Madrid in 1991 as the most serious initiative aimed at putting an end to a conflict that has persisted for decades and that has led to the haemorrhage of great human and economic potential from the peoples of the region. The Madrid Peace Conference and the results achieved on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions and the formula of land for peace, established commitments and obligations for the parties concerned. These should not be questioned or renounced, having been adopted by the parties themselves.

Prospects for the Middle East peace to which we all look forward have nearly materialized as we approach the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the new millennium. This makes it imperative for all parties, particularly the Israeli Government, to seize this opportunity to reach a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

My Government welcomed the signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel as a very important step forward in the peace process. We look forward to the two parties concerned implementing the agreements and commitments they have signed, and we call upon the Israeli party to end its occupation of all occupied Arab territories. Persistence of the occupation is one of the main reasons for the absence of peace. The Israeli party's continuing demolition of Arab houses, establishment and expansion of settlements and renegotiation of issues that have been agreed upon will ultimately thwart efforts to bring about peace, will give the opponents of the peace process a chance to adversely effect that process, and will waste a

historic opportunity to achieve the peace to which all the peoples of the region aspire.

The new Israeli Government is called upon to take decisive steps to resume negotiations with Syria at the point where they left off, to put an end to Israeli occupation of Syrian territory and to withdraw to the lines of 4 June 1967. As for Lebanon, we call upon Israel to withdraw from southern Lebanon and western Bekaa, in accordance with Security Council resolution 425 (1978).

The international community, as represented in this Organization, is called upon to play a constructive role in establishing a comprehensive, permanent and just peace in the Middle East based on the principles of the United Nations Charter and legitimate international decisions. The most important of these decisions is the continuation of the peace process on the basis of legitimate international resolutions, particularly Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 425 (1978), the formula of land for peace and the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination on their land, including the decision to establish an independent State with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital. We would emphasize, first, the need to nullify all measures taken by the Israeli Government to change demographic and geographic facts in Al-Quds, in accordance with and in implementation of Security Council resolution 465 (1980), which considers all settlements illegitimate and calls upon Israel to dismantle them; secondly, the need to bring about a just solution to the problem of Palestinian refugees, in accordance with United Nations resolutions, particularly General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948, concerning the right of refugees to return or to receive compensation; thirdly, the need for full respect for the Fourth Geneva Convention and for a halt to all Israeli violations of its provisions, along with a follow-up of the results of the conference of High Contracting Parties in case Israel continues to violate the provisions of the Convention; and fourthly, the need to support Syria in its logical and just demand to resume negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks at the point where they left off and the need for a full Israeli withdrawal from the Golan heights to the lines of 4 June 1967, as well as an Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon and western Bekaa.

My Government, in its belief that the impact of all types of weapons of mass destruction on humanity will be devastating, has now acceded to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and has signed the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. The NPT regime will not succeed unless we bring about complete international adherence to it. We call upon Israel, the only country in the Middle East that has not yet become a party to the NPT, to subject all its nuclear facilities to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). The fact that those facilities are not controlled by IAEA safeguards will have very dangerous effects on the health and the environment of the peoples of the region. As the review of the NPT approaches, my delegation calls for transforming the Middle East into a nuclear-weapon-free zone within the framework of the United Nations as a serious step towards bringing about a climate that promotes peace, stability and security.

Mr. Wehbe (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The international community fully recognizes that the Middle East peace process, which was launched in Madrid in 1991, was based on the implementation of internationally legitimate resolutions, especially Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), as well as Security Council resolution 425 (1978) on Lebanon. It was also based on an important principle, land for peace. The Madrid Conference was followed by strenuous and long peace talks that resulted in some progress, including the unequivocal pledge made by the former Prime Minister of Israel, Yitzhak Rabin. That pledge, deposited with the American Administration in July 1994, includes a commitment by the then Labour Government of Israel to withdraw to the lines of 4 June 1967 as an indispensable step before dealing with the remaining elements of a full peace agreement. The facts and evolution of this matter are written in the records of the American, Syrian and Israeli sides.

It is well known that the security arrangements on which Rabin concentrated and to which he accorded extreme attention could not have been discussed in detail had there not been an agreement on the line of withdrawal, which must be declared in advance in order to allow the parties to set up the security arrangements on both sides of the line of 4 June. This is what actually happened.

During the debates on the security arrangements, it became clear that there was a need to agree on the principles and objectives of these arrangements so that no side could set up any arrangements that would ignore the security of the other side. In this regard, the Assembly and the international community know full well who is in more urgent need of security: is it the occupier, or is it those who are under occupation?

The discussions among the three sides — Syrian, American and Israeli — went on for a long time, culminating in May 1995 in the definition of those principles and objectives. After that date, a series of reckless actions and offences either in Israel or by Israel took place. The most prominent of these was the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, which was followed by the halting of the peace talks on the Syrian-Israeli track in early 1996. This was followed by an attack against Lebanon and the Qana massacre in April 1996, which was condemned by the General Assembly in the relevant resolution. The massacre flew in the face of the logic of peace altogether.

Despite these obvious facts, a number of Israeli officials still deny the existence of Rabin's pledge and try to camouflage their thwarting of the peace process and their squandering of the opportunities to achieve peace by claiming that it is Syria that committed such negative actions after receiving Rabin's pledge.

This raises several questions. For example, how can Syria be blamed for allegedly failing to seize the opportunity to sign a peace agreement under the conditions I have described, conditions that were created by Israel? How can Syria logically be held responsible for delaying the peace process before completing its other elements, such as security arrangements and normal peaceful relations when it was Israel that halted the peace talks with Syria in early March 1996? The talks continue to be stalled.

In this context, I would like to reaffirm the statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Syrian Arab Republic, Mr. Farouk Al-Shara', to the General Assembly at its current session in early October. He said that the pledge, in and of itself, does not constitute a peace agreement; rather, it is an essential part of such an agreement. We call for the implementation of the rest of the agreement, of those parts related to normal peaceful relations and security arrangements based on the principles and objectives arrived at under the auspices of and with the participation of the United States of America.

When the current Israeli Prime Minister assumed power, he made various statements, including a pledge to revive the Lebanese and Syrian tracks, so as to pave the way for comprehensive peace in the region. However, these statements, which met with approval at the time, were soon followed by disappointing statements and steps. Since then, the conduct and actions of the Israeli Government have flagrantly contradicted those initial statements.

An evaluation of the policy of the Israeli Government during the past six months clearly shows the following. First, this Government is waging with increasing vigour a vicious settlement campaign in the occupied Syrian Golan and in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel has confiscated more land and has built more settlements. It has also assisted the settlers in the Golan and provided them with incentives to expand their settlements — and this was done at the time when Prime Minister Barak was declaring his intention to resume the talks on the Syrian track. During this period the settlement campaign has extended into the Gaza Strip.

Second, Barak's Government still refuses to acknowledge Rabin's pledge; hence, it still shirks Israel's commitment to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967. This boundary line is indisputable.

Third, some Israeli officials say they want to resume talks with Syria without preconditions. This underscores their failure to recognize Rabin's pledge and the results arrived at in the talks held before March 1996. Syria, however, is not imposing any preconditions — rather, it is recalling a previous commitment and a fact fully known to the parties concerned. Syria also affirms the importance of commitment to the results of the previous negotiations.

Fourth, Israel has been bombing southern Lebanon on a daily basis, dropping nail bombs and killing innocent citizens in successive air raids. Israel is killing men, women, children and the elderly in Lebanese towns and villages, destroying civilian facilities and infrastructure. All of this is taking place while Israel is talking about withdrawing from the south. How does this make sense?

Fifth, the insistence by the Barak Government on treating Al-Quds as the eternal capital of Israel is a grave violation of the resolutions of international legitimacy and a poses a grave risk to peace.

Sixth, Israel's continued occupation of the occupied Arab territories and its refusal to withdraw to the line of 4 June 1967 is a rejection of the principle of land for peace, international legitimacy and international law and a breach of the Charter of the United Nations, which is the constitution for international relations.

Seventh, Israel's denial of the rights of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homeland is a violation of human rights and of the resolutions of international legitimacy, especially General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

This assessment raises several questions for the international community, questions for which the answers are self-evident. First, is the continued Israel occupation of the Arab territories compatible with peace? Secondly, are the expansion of settlements, settlement activities and confiscation of Arab territories consistent with peace? Thirdly, do ongoing and daily acts of aggression against southern Lebanon and west Beka'a conform to the search for peace? Fourthly, does the Israeli Government's denial of Mr. Rabin's pledge of a full withdrawal by Israel from the Golan Heights to the line of 4 June 1967 indicate a serious intention to achieve peace? Fifthly, is the Israeli Government's insistence on considering Al-Quds the united capital of Israel consistent with a genuine desire to achieve peace in the region? The answer to these and many other similar questions is well known to the international community, which calls for commitment to the resolutions of the United Nations and to the implementation of the purposes and principles of its Charter.

The other day, someone indicated that a draft resolution had been prepared on the peace process in the Middle East, but that it had not been submitted to the General Assembly. While I thank the States sponsors of the text for their efforts, I wish that they had succeeded in convincing Israel to accept the principle of land for peace, which is the basis of the Middle East peace process and the cornerstone of the Madrid process. It is also considered to be the very essence of the American peace initiative, especially in the light of the fact that if Israel, which rejected the text, had committed itself to the principle of land for peace, the General Assembly would not have been deprived of the draft resolution. The same thing occurred last year, because Israel does not want peace for land. Rather, it wants peace for peace. That is why it rejected the draft resolution.

In this regard, I wish to cite a letter written by former United States President George Bush on 1 June 1991 to President Hafez Al-Assad of the Syrian Arab Republic, published in his book *All the Best*:

(*spoke in English*)

> "I want to make clear that we will be doing so on the only basis possible for a comprehensive peace: Territory for peace applied to all fronts, including the Golan Heights. We will not change this fundamental policy position of ours; nor will we change our non-recognition of Israel's purported "Annexation" of the Golan Heights. While Secretary Baker tells me he made these points to you, we both feel they deserve added emphasis and greater consideration by you." (George Bush, *All the Best*, Scribner, New York, 1999, p. 524).

(*spoke in Arabic*)

One delegation has the habit of stating that there is no need for a resolution on the Golan or on Al-Quds. Therefore, the Golan and Al-Quds must remain outside the General Assembly's purview, on the pretext that the United Nations is not the appropriate forum for discussing matters relating to the peace process. I should like to emphasize here that the United Nations resolutions are the terms of reference and the historic framework for justice in international relations, including the Middle East peace process, which is based on them. The democratic nature of international relations requires transparency in order to apprise the international community of the truth behind developments. The international community is the source of support for efforts to revive the peace process, especially since Israel ignores international resolutions, although they represent the scales of justice and right. We feel that these resolutions are indispensable because they are an imperative framework for preserving the historic rights of peoples.

The Palestinian people has not accepted occupation and is struggling bravely to attain its legitimate and inalienable national rights. The Syrian Arab Republic will pursue its steadfast defence of the just cause of the Palestinian people until that people is able to exercise its legitimate right to establish its independent State on its own land, with Al-Quds as its capital, as well as its rights of return and to self-determination.

Syria is committed to the peace process on the basis of the Madrid Conference. After Mr. Barak's assumption of power, Syria affirmed its readiness to match every step with a similar one. It has also expressed and continues to express its willingness to resume the peace process at the point where it stopped in 1996. This would require Israel to commit itself to the pledge of the late Prime Minister Rabin of a full Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan to the line of 4 June 1967. In this regard, I wish to affirm that the Golan is Syrian and that Syria will not forfeit one grain of its soil or a single

one of its rights. Syria will not be prey to stalling and dilatory tactics that no longer deceive anyone. I should also like to affirm that Syria and Lebanon stand together and that the Syrian and Lebanese tracks run interdependently and are correlative to one another on the road to comprehensive peace. No one can uncouple them. Hence, the Israeli Government should not waste time and effort and miss the opportunity to achieve comprehensive peace in the region, as the Netanyahu Government did. Now more than ever before, realities in the region call now for a more active role by the United States, Russia and Europe, before the peoples of the region are overcome by disappointment. All genuine international efforts must be made to convince Israel of the need to achieve a just and comprehensive peace that will include security, stability, dignity and justice for all, on the basis of commitments stemming from the previous peace talks, particularly since Yitzhak Rabin made a clear commitment to withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the 4 June 1967 borders; this was no hypothetical commitment.

Honourable, genuine peace requires courage based on credibility, commitment and non-procrastination; not the kind of courage that leads to capitulation. Syria is committed to saving this opportunity for peace. However, if this opportunity is squandered because of continued intransigence, rejection and manipulation of the various negotiating tracks, then Israel alone will bear the responsibility.

In conclusion, let me call on those States that believe in the justness of the Syrian position — a position in favour of a comprehensive and just peace — to sponsor draft resolution A/54/L.41, on the occupied Syrian Golan, and to vote in favour of that draft resolution.

Mr. Suh (Republic of Korea): The Republic of Korea is pleased to see that progress is being made in advancing the peace process in the Middle East. The signing of the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September 1999 in Cairo by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization is another breath of fresh air in a process that had stagnated since last year's Wye River Memorandum. In this context, we are pleased to note that the new agreement contains a time-frame for the implementation of all the commitments made by the two parties since Oslo and reaffirmed in 1998 by the Wye River Memorandum, with the aim of reaching a comprehensive agreement on all permanent status issues by September 2000.

Through direct negotiations, the Israelis and the Palestinians have delimited a series of goals concerning security, the restoration of land and new economic possibilities. These goals represent steps towards building a partnership where new trust replaces old antagonisms. In particular, my delegation notes with satisfaction that the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum addresses the issues of further Israeli redeployment from the West Bank, the release of Palestinian prisoners by the Israelis, safe passage for Palestinians from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip, the construction of the Gaza seaport and a timetable for permanent status negotiations. We are equally pleased to note that steps are already being taken to implement the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum.

Achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East for the new millennium would be a remarkable accomplishment after decades of instability and war in the region. Peace in the Middle East will significantly contribute to bringing greater peace and stability throughout the world. The leaders who have risked their lives to achieve peace and to further negotiations are to be admired for their vision and courage in the name of generations to come. Moreover, the efforts by those who have struggled to advance the cause of peace against the odds must be applauded and resolutely encouraged. The international community should therefore endeavour to create the most propitious environment for peace to be realized both on paper and in reality.

The importance of economic development cannot be overlooked. For peace to be lasting and genuine, economic prosperity and growth must come to all the populations involved in the conflict. In this light, my country is firmly committed to economic cooperation with the Palestinians. Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, has pointed out that the Palestinian economy remains on a weak foundation that is still under construction. However, he added the encouraging note that the Palestinian economy is growing at about 4 per cent per year and that employment opportunities are expanding as the Sharm el-Sheikh Agreement and its implementation allow people to believe once again that a comprehensive and lasting peace will be achieved. Indeed, building hope is key to building peace.

The Government of Korea has long believed in this ideal. Hence, at the very beginning of the peace process, in October 1993, my Government pledged a total of $5 million in grant aid and $10 million in soft loans to the Palestinians at the international conference on assistance to the Palestinians, held in Washington D.C.

Furthermore, in November 1998, at the Conference to Support Middle East Peace and Development, my Government pledged $2 million for the period of 2000-2004. I take this opportunity to reaffirm the Republic of Korea's commitment to continue expanding its economic cooperation.

As national economic development can better thrive in a dynamic regional context, the Government of the Republic of Korea has placed a great deal of importance on the Middle East and North African economic summits, in which we have participated since the first meeting. We contributed $1.5 million dollars, including over $1,280,000 towards the Middle East Desalination Research Centre.

Making peace a lasting reality in the Middle East can be achieved only through dialogue and negotiations based on the principle of land for peace, agreed upon at the Madrid Conference, and Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Moreover, to ensure lasting trust, the agreements achieved thus far should be scrupulously respected and implemented.

With the improvement along the Israeli-Palestinian track, my Government hopes to see progress on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks as well, for only a comprehensive peace settlement will bring true peace, security and stability to all the peoples of the region.

Peace in the Middle East would be an exemplary model for those who seek peace in other regions of the world. Thus, the Republic of Korea is fully committed to helping achieve peace, stability and security, as well as economic prosperity, in the Middle East.

Mr. Petrella (Argentina)(*spoke in Spanish*): At the beginning of this year, we noted a lack of progress in negotiations aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the Middle East question. Fortunately, the prospects at the end of this year are different now that the parties have resumed talks. Since the signing of the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum on 4 September, we have seen a new withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the West Bank, an agreement for the release of prisoners, the opening of a corridor between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and the resumption of the permanent status negotiations. Similarly, in the trilateral negotiations of Oslo, the parties agreed to establish additional mechanisms on a timetable for finalizing the framework agreement on the final status.

Argentina would like to congratulate the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Barak, and the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mr. Yasser Arafat, for the courage and wisdom they have shown throughout these complex negotiations. Their efforts give us renewed hope that peace ultimately will triumph in this region.

There are still important questions to resolve. That is why we ask the parties to pursue their dialogue and to maintain the achievements reached since the signing of the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum, ensuring that there is a necessary climate of mutual trust.

I wish to reiterate that peace in the Middle East must be achieved on the basis of full application in good faith of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), as well as the agreements of Madrid and Oslo, the Washington Declaration of Principles and the Sharm El-Sheikh Memorandum. It is only within the framework of strict compliance with these instruments that the delicate questions involved in the final status will be resolved.

In the light of this, we renew our call on the parties to abstain from carrying out acts which would prejudge the final status and destroy the delicate balance which has been achieved with such great effort. In this framework, the construction of settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, is a unilateral measure which runs counter to the long-term and fundamental interests of Israel to live in peace with its neighbours. At the same time, Argentina firmly condemns any acts of violence and rejects as inadmissible the use of terrorist acts. Israel has the right to live within internationally recognized and safe borders, without acts or threats of acts of violence.

Bilateral negotiations are the driving force in this peace process, and it is through them that we will find a solution to all pending issues. However, we must recall that the United Nations has a special and historic responsibility to Palestine which has been maintained and consolidated throughout half a century. The creation of peacekeeping operations, the uninterrupted assistance to Palestinian refugees and the personal commitment of the Secretaries-General to peace are clear signs of this.

Argentina feels that stability and economic and social development are elements which will contribute to the consolidation of the peace process. This is why my country has participated in United Nations peacekeeping operations since their inception and, more recently, in the "White Helmets" initiative and has cooperated in successful urban planning and human development

programmes in the municipalities of Gaza, Rafah, Khan Yunis and Bethlehem.

There will not be any comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East, as requested in Security Council and General Assembly resolutions, unless progress is made simultaneously in all areas of the peace process. We have noted with concern the lack of dialogue between Syria and Israel regarding the Golan Heights, and we urge the parties to resume their talks in a frank and constructive spirit. The situation in southern Lebanon must also be resolved urgently. Argentina reiterates its commitment to territorial integrity, political independence and full sovereignty for Lebanon, and we reiterate the need to apply Security Council resolution 425 (1978) to the letter.

The peace process has entered into one of its most promising and yet most difficult phases. That is why we call upon the parties to take this unique opportunity and to continue on the path of law and understanding, which will lead to a true reconciliation between the peoples. Argentina hopes that one of the first achievements of the new millennium will be the consolidation of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar)(*spoke in Arabic*): As we discuss agenda items 43 and 44 of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly, it pleases me to convey my thanks and appreciation to Secretary-General Kofi Annan on his two reports submitted under these two items pursuant to General Assembly resolutions 53/37 and 53/38 of 2 December 1998.

All the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy called upon Israel, the occupying Power, to withdraw from all occupied Arab territories. But, Israel has continued to intensify its settlement activities instead of responding to those resolutions.

Anyone who follows Israeli policies and practices can see clearly the gradual and steady increase in the rate of settlement activity in the occupied Arab territories, particularly in Al-Quds Al-Sharif and its surrounding areas. These areas have witnessed a brutal increase in the building of new settlements and in the expansion of existing settlements, which have doubled in area. Such activity reveals Israel's hidden agenda: the establishment of a new geographic and demographic fait accompli. Expanding the city limits of Al-Quds, as one link in the Israeli expansionist chain, the confiscation of Palestinian lands, the confiscation of the identity cards of residents of Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the demolition of Palestinian houses are other examples in this ongoing saga.

The Israeli decision of 14 December 1981 to impose its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the occupied Syrian Golan is null and void and totally illegitimate. I would like to recall here Security Council resolution 497 (1981), which emphasized this and which called upon Israel to abide by its provisions. If Israel is really serious about reaching a just and comprehensive settlement in the region, it will have to respond to the international will and to the resolutions of international legitimacy and withdraw from the occupied Syrian Golan to the lines that existed before 4 June 1967.

We emphasize that all the relevant provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 concerning the protection of civilian persons in time of war continue to apply to all Arab territories occupied since 1967.

The holding of a conference of High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention for the first time in the history of the Convention, and the fact that the High Contracting Parties affirmed the applicability of the provisions of the Convention to the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, and called for full respect for this Convention, constitute a moral and ethical commitment on the part of the parties to the Convention.

Qatar calls on all States that have consulates or embassies in Al-Quds to respond to Security Council resolution 478 (1980), adopted on 20 August 1980, and to the many General Assembly resolutions calling for States to withdraw their diplomatic missions from Al-Quds Al-Sharif.

The State of Qatar has supported the Middle East peace process since it was launched at Madrid on the basis of the formula of land for peace and the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978). Qatar emphasizes once again its support for the peace process based on the principles on which it was launched.

Qatar calls upon the Israeli Government to expedite the start of talks on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks and to implement all agreements concluded with the Palestinians in order to reach a just and comprehensive peace in the region. That would enable us to enter the new millennium with new hopes and aspirations; hopes of establishing peace, security and stability for all our

peoples and for future generations so that we all can enjoy a dignified life in freedom and can participate with other peoples in the building of human civilization.

Before I conclude, I must salute all those who are striving to bring about a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, particularly the sponsors of the peace process. I emphasize the importance of their role in this critical period, which requires greater efforts to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region.

The Acting President: In accordance with resolution 3369 (XXX) of 10 October 1975, I now call on the observer of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Hosseini (Organization of the Islamic Conference): The Middle East peace process was launched eight years ago with great hopes and expectations. Its main objective was to find a just and comprehensive solution of the question of Palestine and the related conflict in the Middle East, the effects of which have left the Palestinian people in an unspeakably shattered state for over half a century. Their reward for wanting to live an independent, hardworking and honourable life in their own land, under their own sovereignty and as proud members of the international community of nations has been death, disablement, destruction of their homes, unemployment and violations of their civil and human rights by the Israeli authorities. And Israel's illegal occupation of southern Lebanon, the western Bekaa and the Syrian Golan continues.

The reports of the Secretary-General contained in documents A/54/457 and A/54/495 shed light on the realities of the situation I have just described.

At the Annual Coordinating Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), held in New York on 1 October 1999, the OIC reaffirmed its support for the Middle East peace process, in accordance with the principles adopted at the Madrid Conference and consistent with United Nations resolutions, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), and the land for peace formula, all of which call for Israeli withdrawal from all occupied Palestinian and other Arab territories, including the city of Al-Quds Al-Sharif, and for the realization of the inalienable national rights of the Palestinian people.

At the meeting, the Foreign Ministers condemned Israel's policy to refuse to comply with Security Council resolution 497 (1981), and to impose its jurisdiction and its administration on the occupied Syrian Golan, as well as Israel's policies of annexation, establishment of settlements, expropriation of lands, diversion of water resources, and imposition of Israeli nationality on Syrian citizens. They affirmed that all those measures are null and void, and constitute a violation of the rules and principles of international law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949; they demanded the complete withdrawal of Israel from the entire occupied Syrian Golan to the lines of 4 June 1967.

The Foreign Ministers strongly condemned Israel's continuing occupation of southern Lebanon and the western Bekaa and its arbitrary practices and military acts of aggression against Lebanese citizens and against the Palestinian refugees in their camps in Lebanon. They called upon the Security Council to take the necessary measures to put an immediate end to these acts of aggression, and called for the implementation of Security Council resolutions on Lebanon, especially Council resolution 425 (1978). At the meeting, the Foreign Ministers also affirmed their resolve to maintain the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon within its internationally recognized borders.

The OIC maintains the view that it is necessary to resume peace negotiations on the Syrian and Lebanese tracks from the point at which they stopped in February 1996, in line with the results that had been achieved and also on the same basis on which they were started in Madrid.

In the spirit of seeking peace and security in the Middle East region, the OIC once again draws attention to the dangerous situation that continues to prevail as a result of Israel's failure to comply with United Nations resolutions, particularly Security Council resolution 487 (1981), which calls upon Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and to implement resolutions of the General Assembly and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) calling for the subjection of all Israeli atomic facilities to the Agency's comprehensive safeguards system. This would be an indispensable step for the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction — primarily nuclear weapons — in the Middle East, and for the establishment of a just and comprehensive peace in the region.

On 29 November we commemorated the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People here at the United Nations with a traditional

meeting to mark the occasion. A message from the Secretary-General of the OIC was among those that were received from all over the world from heads of State and Government and international organizations. It was a message of peace, a call for reason and an appeal for the extension of every support to the Palestinian people to help alleviate their sufferings resulting from many years of occupation, repression and denial of the exercise of their inalienable national rights.

The OIC holds the view that the question of Palestine constitutes the core of the long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict, the only solution to which would be the independence of Palestine, bestowing dignity and sovereignty upon the Palestinian people, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as their national capital.

Stemming from the provisions of international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions and agreements reached between the parties, it is imperative that Israel ceases the construction and expansion of its illegal settlements on Palestinian lands and that it refrain from any acts that would arbitrarily alter the legal status and the demographic structure of Al-Quds al-Sharif.

At this stage, I would like to pay tribute to Ambassador Ka of Senegal, Chairman of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, for his astute and dynamic leadership of the work of the Committee; and to recall the close and fruitful cooperation between the Committee and the OIC in support of the rights of the Palestinian people. I now pay tribute to Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his active and collaborative role in dealing with issues of Palestine and the Middle East.

I also take this opportunity to commend the roles being played by Mr. Terje Roed-Larsen, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority; and to Mr. Peter Hansen, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). We express our appreciation for their work and that of their colleagues in the funds, programmes and agencies of the United Nations, especially the United Nations Development Programme, who have collectively supported the development efforts of the Palestinian people under very difficult conditions. In this connection, we fully share the view of the Secretary-General that UNRWA should be put on a sound financial footing so that the downgrading in its services to the Palestinian refugees can be avoided.

In conclusion, I would like to state that in the ongoing peace process lies the opportunity for uniting efforts for the attainment of peace, tranquillity and progress for countries in the Middle East and beyond, for they all stand to gain immeasurably from the long-awaited positive turn of events in that troubled region.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item. The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolutions A/54/L.40 and A/54/L.41.

We shall turn first to draft resolution A/54/L.40, entitled "Jerusalem". I should like to inform the Assembly that Togo has become a sponsor of this draft resolution.

A recorded vote has been requested.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic,

Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:
Israel

Abstaining:
Swaziland, United States of America, Uzbekistan

Draft resolution A/54/L.40 was adopted by 139 votes to 1, with 3 abstentions (resolution 54/37).

[Subsequently, the delegations of Barbados, Bolivia and the Republic of Moldova informed the Secretariat that they had intended to vote in favour.]

The Acting President: Draft resolution A/54/L.41 is entitled "The Syrian Golan". I would also like to inform the Assembly that Egypt, Kuwait and Togo have become co-sponsors of this draft resolution.

A recorded vote has been requested.

In favour:
Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Jordan, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Qatar, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:
Israel, United States of America

Abstaining:
Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Marshall Islands, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Paraguay, Peru, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Romania, Samoa, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, Spain, Swaziland, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uruguay, Uzbekistan

Draft resolution A/54/L.41 was adopted by 92 votes to 2, with 53 abstentions (resolution 54/38).

[Subsequently, the delegations of Barbados, Benin and Bolivia informed the Secretariat that they had intended to vote in favour, and the delegation of the Republic of Moldova had intended to abstain.]

The Acting President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of vote on the resolution just adopted.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Ms. Korpi (Finland): I have the honour to explain the vote of the European Union on draft resolution A/54/L.41.

The European Union reiterates its firm commitment to a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement in the Middle East based on the Madrid and Oslo Accords. The European Union warmly welcomes the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum and the recent resumption of the permanent status negotiations. We also fully support an early resumption of negotiations on the Lebanese and Syrian tracks.

As in previous years, the resolution regarding the Syrian Golan contains geographical references which prejudge the outcome of bilateral negotiations. That is why the European Union has again abstained in the voting.

The European Union regrets that this year again it has not been possible to reach agreement on the resolution on the Middle East peace process under this agenda item. We commend the initiators of this text — Norway, the Russian Federation and the United States — for their efforts to reach agreement with the interested parties.

Mr. Estreme (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): The Republic of Argentina voted in favour of draft resolution A/54/L.41 on the Syrian Golan because it considers that the essential aspect of this resolution is related to the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by force. Article 2, paragraph 4, of the Charter of the United Nations prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity of any State. This is an imperative norm of international law.

I wish also to clarify the position of the delegation of Argentina on operative paragraph 6. Our vote does not necessarily prejudge the contents of that operative paragraph, in particular as regards the line of 4 June 1967.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon)(*spoke in Arabic*): We were surprised the other day by the Israeli representative's reference to General Assembly resolution 2625 (XXV) relating to the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. He singled out a paragraph from that resolution on the duty of States to refrain from organizing terrorist acts in another State or carrying out such acts from their territory.

I would like here to indicate that Israel has consistently refused to abide by international resolutions. This is evidenced by the fact that its Permanent Representative has disregarded the resolutions and principles explicitly violated by his country, especially the principle that requires States, in their relations with other States, to refrain from the use or the threat of use of force by States against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State or in any other manner inconsistent with the objectives of the Charter.

The representative of Israel also disregarded the principle contained in the paragraph immediately following the one he quoted. That paragraph states that the territory of a State shall not be the object of military occupation resulting from the use of force in contravention of the provisions of the Charter, and that no territorial acquisition resulting from the threat or use of force shall be recognized.

In sum, this resolution is considered a major point of reference in international law. Israel flagrantly violates this law whereas the law supports the rights of people under foreign occupation. They have the right to wage a legitimate struggle for the liberation of their territories; hence, the paragraph that the Israeli representative excerpted is relevant to terrorism and not to legitimate resistance. There is a big difference between terrorism and legitimate resistance.

I would also like to draw the attention of the Israeli representative to two points. First, the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon preceded the resistance, which came after the occupation. Secondly, Israel's refusal to completely withdraw from southern Lebanon and to allow the United Nations forces to deploy up to international borders, in keeping with Security Council resolution 425 (1978), led to the emergence of the Lebanese resistance.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): I am really sorry to address the General Assembly at this late hour, but the statement just made by the representative of Lebanon compels me to respond.

It is unfortunate that the representative of Lebanon continues to attack Israel in this forum rather than to engage Israel in the constructive channel of negotiations that are available for resolving the issues at hand. His remarks serve only to distract attention from the fact that the Government of Lebanon is directly responsible for the volatile situation in the southern part of its territory, which it allows to continue, in contravention of international law.

Lebanon continues to wage a terrorist campaign against a neighbouring State, one which is declaredly aimed at the very existence of that State. Despite the statement just made by the representative of Lebanon, it should be recalled that the Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations and

Cooperation among States, contained in resolution 2625 (XXV) of 24 October 1970, provides that sovereignty carries with it a responsibility not to allow terrorism acts to be organized and perpetrated on one's territory or launched from it.

The policies of Lebanon are in direct conflict with that resolution. Instead of disarming the Hezbollah, as is its obligation under international norms, Lebanon grants the militia group free rein in southern Lebanon, leaving Israel with no option but to act in accordance with its sovereign right to self-defence. Nevertheless, Israel has repeatedly expressed its willingness to negotiate with Lebanon the implementation of resolution 425 (1978) in its entirety. This would restore, at long last, peace and security to our common border. However, rather than respond to that invitation, Lebanon has instead allowed the conflict to continue and the human toll to rise.

The confrontational remarks made here today only underscore Lebanon's ongoing refusal to negotiate a solution to the conflict. We call upon the Government of Lebanon to join us at the negotiating table with the aim of working together to restore peace and stability to our common border.

Mr. Tadmoury (Lebanon) (*spoke in Arabic*): I apologize for taking the floor once again, but I would like to ask the Israeli representative one question: what is the reason for the presence of Lebanese resistance forces in the south? It is the occupation. The root of the problem in Lebanon is the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon, which runs counter to United Nations resolutions and other international laws, principles and norms.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): I believe that my earlier statement was clear enough. However, the representative of Lebanon saw fit to pose a question to me. I would like to suggest to him that the appropriate forum to discuss all pending questions between the two countries is the peace negotiations. I would like to reiterate our invitation to the Government of Lebanon to join Israel around the negotiating table in order to restore peace and stability to our common border.

Agenda item 44 (*continued*)

Question of Palestine

Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (A/54/35)

Report of the Secretary-General (A/54/457)

Draft resolutions (A/54/L.42, A/54/L.43, A/54/L.44, A/54/L.45)

Mr. Ka (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): I should like to comment on draft resolution A/54/L.45. I should simply like to say that the penultimate preambular paragraph of the draft resolution contains a typographical error. The end of the paragraph should read, "including the donor meeting held at Tokyo, on 14 and 15 October 1999". This is a purely technical matter that needs to be corrected. I am sure that the Secretariat will take my comments into account. The draft resolution needs no other change.

The Acting President: I have taken note of the statement by the representative of Senegal on that technical error.

We shall now proceed to consider draft resolutions A/54/L.42, A/54/L.43, A/54/L.44 and A/54/L.45.

I shall now give the floor to those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of vote before the voting. May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Burleigh (United States of America): My Government opposes the four draft resolutions under agenda item 44, entitled "Question of Palestine". The first three of these draft resolutions support institutions whose activities and approach to the issues are unbalanced and outdated. They barely take note of the considerable achievements that have occurred in the Middle East peace process — and progress continues to be made. The safe passage route between Gaza and the West Bank is operating, the Gaza seaport has been approved, further redeployments have been made, additional prisoners have been released and the parties have begun talks on a framework agreement for permanent status.

The General Assembly should be in the business of supporting this process of negotiation — supporting the attempt to reach agreements that can lead to a peaceful settlement of disputes. It should not be in the business of issuing one-sided criticism or authorizing the wasteful expenditure of funds for anachronistic committees and reports.

The draft resolution entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine" (A/54/L.45) lays out the position of one party to the negotiations. By adopting this draft resolution, the General Assembly would seek to inappropriately interject its views into these negotiations. This is as unhelpful as it is ineffectual. It produces words, not results.

The United States strongly supports the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The United States is working hard to promote that objective. We regret that the drafts before us complicate those efforts and the efforts of the parties themselves to achieve a settlement. We will vote against these four draft resolutions and invite others to do the same.

Mr. Jacob (Israel): Israel will vote against the draft resolutions contained in documents A/54/L.42, A/54/L.43, A/54/L.44 and A/54/L.45. The ritualistic recycling of these outdated draft resolutions year after year remains utterly oblivious to the burgeoning peace process and the new realities in the Middle East.

Draft resolution A/54/L.42 and A/54/L.43 refer, respectively, to what are termed the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat. Since their inception, these bodies have obstructed dialogue and understanding through a pre-set, one-sided portrayal of the Arab-Israeli conflict. They are engaged in activities which hinder, rather than promote, progress towards achieving a peaceful, negotiated and mutually acceptable solution.

In addition, these bodies expend valuable resources which could be better invested in responding to the real needs of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Draft resolution A/54/L.44 endorses the Special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat. This programme, through its various seminars, missions and exhibits, also promotes a distorted and one-sided perspective of the conflict.

Draft resolution A/54/L.45 claims to support a "peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine", just as it makes reference to Israeli-Palestinian agreements, beginning with the Israeli-PLO Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements of 13 September 1993. Yet the draft resolution, in content and purpose, actually goes against those agreements and undermines the peace process it professes to support. The Declaration of Principles and the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which are cited in the preambular paragraphs, directly prohibit the use of such extraneous and prejudicial instruments as this draft resolution. As stated in article XXXI, sub-article 7, of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement of 28 September 1995,

> "Neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations".

Furthermore, it should be recalled that the Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, Yasser Arafat, wrote to the late Prime Minister of Israel, Itzhak Rabin, on 9 September 1993 that

> "The PLO commits itself to the Middle East peace process, and to a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the two sides and declares that all outstanding issues relating to permanent status will be resolved through negotiations."

It should be further recalled that all diplomatic breakthroughs in the Middle East, beginning with the Camp David Accords right up until the recent Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum, were arrived at exclusively through direct negotiations between the parties. However, this draft resolution openly seeks to predetermine the issues to be resolved by those negotiations, even as Israel and the Palestinians commit themselves to the permanent status talks that are now under way. Therefore, this draft resolution both violates existing agreements and undermines the integrity and the foundations of the peace process. That is why Israel must vote against this draft resolution.

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolutions A/54/L.42, A/54/L.43, A/54/L.44 and A/54/L.45.

We turn first to draft resolution A/54/L.42, entitled "Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People". I would like to inform the Assembly that the following additional Member States have become sponsors of the draft resolution: Bahrain, Mali, Namibia, Oman, Togo and Viet Nam.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saint Lucia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Marshall Islands, United States of America

Abstaining:

Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uzbekistan

Draft resolution A/54/L.42 was adopted by 105 votes to 3, with 48 abstentions (resolution 54/39).

[Subsequently, the delegation of Barbados informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote in favour.]

The Acting President: We turn next to draft resolution A/54/L.43, entitled "Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat". I would like to inform the Assembly that the following additional Member States have become sponsors of the draft resolution: Bahrain, Mali, Namibia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Togo and Viet Nam.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Cyprus, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Jamaica, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Saint Lucia, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Marshall Islands, United States of America

Abstaining:

Andorra, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland,

France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Uzbekistan

Draft resolution A/54/L.43 was adopted by 107 votes to 3, with 47 abstentions (resolution 54/40).

[Subsequently, the delegation of Barbados informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote in favour.]

The Acting President: We turn next to draft resolution A/54/L.44, entitled "Special information programme on the question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat". I would like to inform the Assembly that the following additional Member States have become sponsors of the draft resolution: Bahrain, Mali, Namibia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Togo and Viet Nam.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Marshall Islands, United States of America

Abstaining:

Micronesia (Federated States of), Uzbekistan

Draft resolution A/54/L.44 was adopted by 151 votes to 3, with 2 abstentions (resolution 54/41).

[Subsequently, the delegation of Barbados informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote in favour.]

The Acting President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/54/L.45, entitled "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine". I would like to inform the Assembly that the following additional Member States have become sponsors of the draft resolution: Bahrain, Mali, Namibia, Saudi Arabia, Togo and Viet Nam.

A recorded vote has been requested.

A recorded vote was taken.

In favour:

Afghanistan, Algeria, Andorra, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bhutan, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Cape Verde, Chile, China,

Colombia, Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Djibouti, Dominica, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Grenada, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritius, Mexico, Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Myanmar, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Thailand, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, Uruguay, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Yemen, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Against:

Israel, Marshall Islands, United States of America

Abstaining:

Micronesia (Federated States of), Uzbekistan

Draft resolution A/54/L.45 was adopted by 149 votes to 3, with 2 abstentions (resolution 54/42).

[Subsequently, the delegation of Barbados informed the Secretariat that it had intended to vote in favour.]

The Acting President: I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in explanation of vote on the resolutions just adopted.

May I remind delegations that explanations of vote are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. Macedo (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation voted in favour of draft resolution A/54/L.45 because it believes that a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine is one of the elements that is vital to the settlement of the Middle East conflict. However, I would like to reiterate the following regarding the content of operative paragraph 3.

Mexico notes that one of the basic principles of the peace process in the Middle East is the return of land in exchange for peace. The land-for-peace formula has proved its usefulness in the search for a solution to this particular conflict. It would seem risky, however, to make land-for-peace a universal legal principle to be applied as a norm in all conflicts.

Above and beyond that basic principle, there is the general principle of international law holding that conquest does not grant territorial rights. We all recognize, as a fundamental norm, that the acquisition of territory through the use of force is inadmissible. As a corollary to this universal principle, it must be concluded that the entirety of any territory occupied during an armed conflict must be returned to its legitimate owner without conditions.

For these reasons, the delegation of Mexico reiterates that, while we recognize the political value of the land-for-peace principle, we feel it would be unsound to raise this to the level of a general principle of international law. Mexico would like to call once again for greater precision in the language used to describe a political understanding that is not, and cannot be, a universal legal principle.

In fact, in the preambular part of draft resolution A/54/L.41, on the Syrian Golan, which the Assembly adopted in this meeting, the phrase used in English is "the formula of land for peace", an expression that seems to us to very accurately describe the understanding, but that the United Nations Secretariat regrettably insists on translating incorrectly into Spanish. The word "formula" should be translated as "*fórmula*" in Spanish, a word we would prefer to see in all draft resolutions on this matter. For Mexico, this is a question of legal terminological rigour and has no bearing on the substance of the political understanding.

Ms. Korpi (Finland): I have the honour of explaining the vote of the European Union on the draft resolutions concerning the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, contained

in document A/54/L.42, and the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, contained in document A/54/L.43.

Important progress has been made in the Middle East peace process over the years with a view to establishing a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the area. The European Union warmly welcomes the recent signing of the Sharm-el Sheikh Memorandum and the resumption of permanent status negotiations. The European Union regrets that the mandate of the two United Nations entities in charge of the agenda item "Question of Palestine" do not better take into account the spirit of the peace process. That is why the European Union has, as in the cases of previous years, abstained in the voting on the two draft resolutions.

The European Union, however, welcomes the ongoing dialogue with the Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. We are prepared to continue this exchange of views, with the particular aim of adjusting the mandate and the activities of the Committee to the spirit of Madrid and the Oslo accords, in order to allow full support for and a constructive contribution to the peace process.

The Acting President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of vote after the voting. The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 44.

I give the floor to the observer of Palestine.

Mr. Al-Kidwa (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish to convey our sincere thanks to all the Member States that supported the resolutions just adopted under the agenda items "Question of Palestine" and "The situation in the Middle East". In particular, I wish to express our thanks to the Chairman and members of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People and to the States that sponsored these resolutions.

The wide support enjoyed by these resolutions — by a majority of Member States — is a matter of great significance. It reaffirms the commitment by the international community to uphold the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to continue the efforts that we made to attain peace on the basis of international law and the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.

All of this sends a crystal-clear and correct message to the Palestinian and Israeli sides. We earnestly hope that the Israeli side will abandon its present policy and positions and will start complying with requirements of international legitimacy.

With particular reference to resolution 54/37, on Jerusalem, I wish to point out that only Israel voted against it. The situation today reaffirms the significance of that Holy City to the whole international community. The unilateral possession of that city cannot be accepted, because it is important to all three monotheistic, revealed religions.

We had also hoped that the General Assembly would adopt a resolution on peace in the Middle East. We appreciate the efforts of the United States of America, the Russian Federation and Norway in this respect, but, regrettably, this did not take place. Whether delegations believe this or not, the reason the Assembly will not be adopting such a resolution is that the Israeli side — even with the advent of the new Israeli Administration — continues to renounce the principle of land for peace, and, in this case, it has refused to allow this principle to be noted in such a resolution. This behaviour calls into question the genuineness and credibility of all the efforts that are being made to reach a peaceful settlement.

The international community expects the United Nations Member States to observe the Charter and the resolutions of the United Nations. It expects them not to violate international law. Usually, even when a certain State does not behave in this fashion it shows a measure of shame and embarrassment. Israel is the single State that not only consistently violates hundreds of United Nations resolutions, including the relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions, but that does so defiantly in broad daylight. With neither shame nor impunity it talks of how it flouts those resolutions.

In recent years it has not limited itself to such behaviour, but rather, as we have seen today, it has also accused the international community of being misguided and has called on it to return to the right path. Israel claims that the error lies in the resolutions of international legitimacy. During the last 30 years, Israel's policies have been in staunch opposition to all the relevant resolutions. Its policies have not reflected respect for international law or the principles of the Charter. This is unprecedented behaviour. It is hard to understand such a policy.

The international community has to take the necessary steps to end this misguided conduct. No State

is above international law or above this international Organization. We all have to work on this basis, because it is the proper foundation for achieving just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. This process should begin with the settlement of the question of Palestine and allow for the coexistence of the peoples and States of the region, including the Palestinian State.

I wish to reiterate my gratitude to all the delegations and to the President of the Assembly.

The meeting rose at 12.35 p.m.